Isaac ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

$1.75 AUGUST 1984

DA[illegible]EYS MORAN &
GL[illegible]
PR[illegible]LLA
REA[illegible]

FRE[illegible]OHL

GEO[illegible]EC
EFFI[illegible]

BAR[illegible]
OWE[illegible]

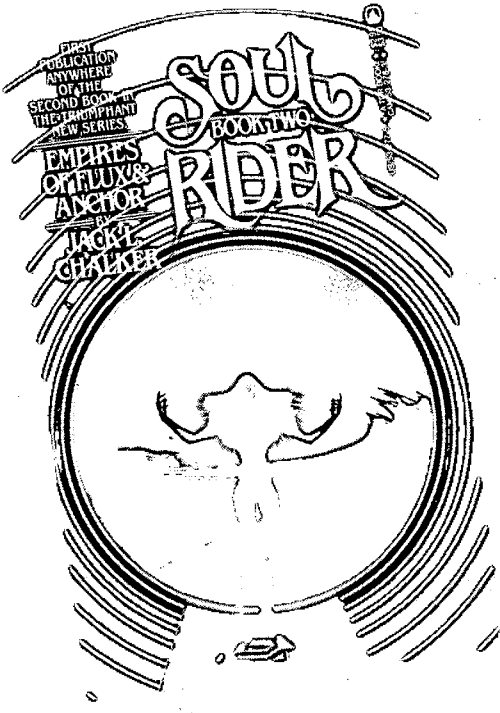
VIEW[illegible]

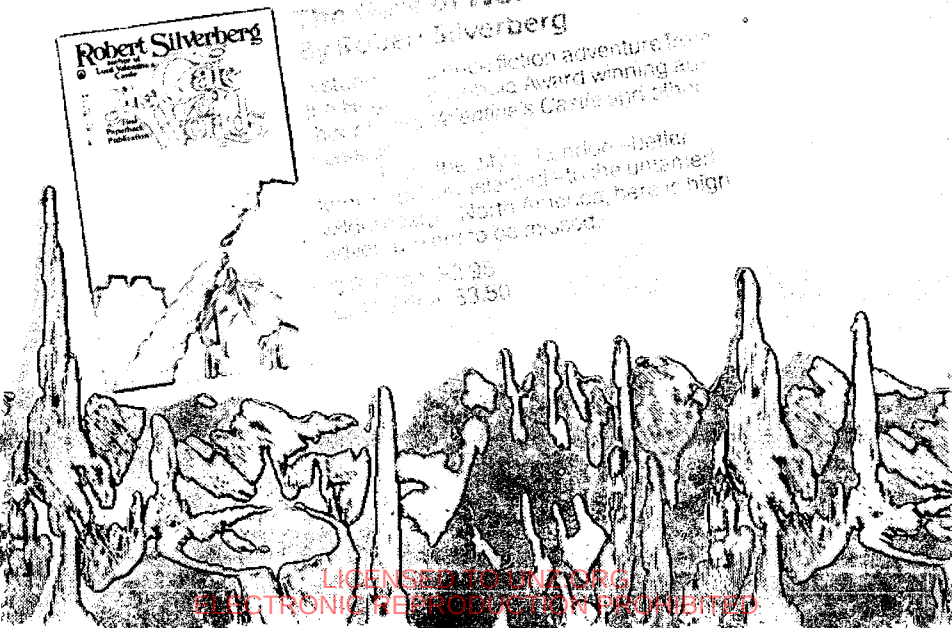
THE FERMI PARADOX

RICZSE4H3E0D69DEC 85 1 03
DAVID CRAIG
2486 E SCENIC AVE
OAKLAND CA
94602

02648 08
0 387167

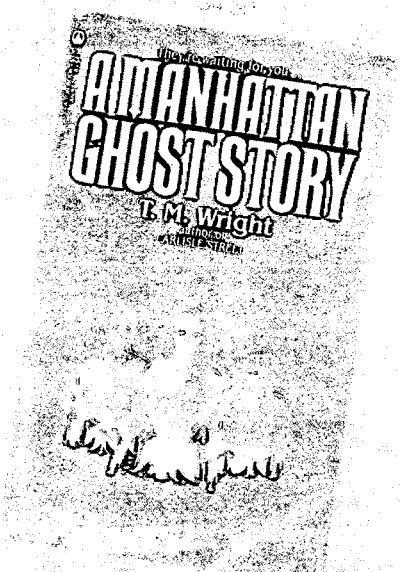
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

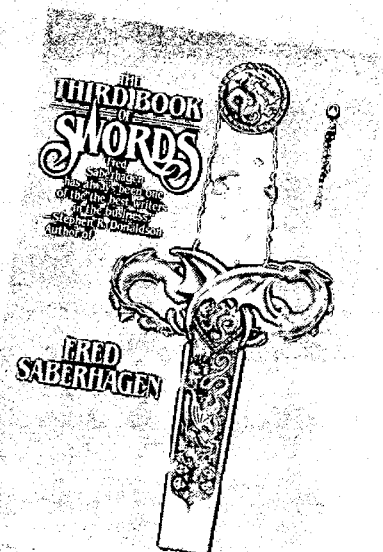

FIRST PUBLICATION ANYWHERE OF THE SECOND BOOK IN THE TRIUMPHANT NEW SERIES
SOUL RIDER
BOOK TWO
EMPIRES OF FLUX & ANCHOR
JACK L. CHALKER



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Manhattan Ghost Story
by T.M. Wright





LICENSED TO GNZ INC.
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The timely new novel in the series begun by On A Pale Horse!

Cover illustration by Michael Whelan

BEARING AN HOURGLASS

Book Two of
Incarnations of Immortality
PIERS ANTHONY

Norton had lost both the child and the woman he loved. So he didn't mind accepting when the position of Time was offered to him. But what started as an enjoyable experience—living backwards, from present to past—became a war with Satan himself...

#1 in Science Fiction and Fantasy Published by Ballantine Books

A Del Rey Hardcover $13.95

DEL REY

On Sale in August

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

28

Isaac ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

Vol. 8 No. 8 (whole no. 81)
August 1984
Next issue on sale
July 31, 1984

Novelettes

70 How F. Scott Fitzgerald Became Beloved in Springfield — George Alec Effinger
138 Realtime — Gladys Prebehalla and Daniel Keys Moran

138

Short Stories

20 Around the Solar System — Martin Gardner
28 Sitting Around the Pool, Soaking Up the Rays — Frederik Pohl
52 Resurrection — Damien Broderick
88 Blue Crick Holler Folks — Barbara Owens
104 From the Labyrinth of Night — Lillian Stewart Carl
117 In The Specimen Jar — Daniel Gilbert
125 The Fire at Sarah Siddons — Robert Thurston

Departments

6 Editorial: The Faces of Science Fiction — Isaac Asimov
12 Letters
15 Mooney's Module — Gerry Mooney
24 Gaming — Dana Lombardy
40 Viewpoint: The Fermi Paradox — Stephen L. Gillett, Ph.D.
171 On Books: A Matter of Style — Norman Spinrad
178 The SF Conventional Calendar — Erwin S. Strauss

Poem by Steve Rasnic Tem

Cover art by Hisaki Yasuda

88

Joel Davis: President & Publisher **Isaac Asimov:** Editorial Director
Shawna McCarthy: Editor

Published 13 times a year by Davis Publications, Inc. at $1.75 per copy, Jan.-Dec. issues, $1.95 Special Mid-Dec. issue; annual subscription of thirteen issues $19.50 in the United States and U.S. possessions. In all other countries $24.20, payable in advance in U.S. funds. Address for subscriptions and all other correspondence about them, P.O. Box 1933, Marion OH 43305. Address for all editorial matters: Davis Publications, Inc. 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017. Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine® is the registered trademark of Davis Publications, Inc. © 1984 by Davis Publications, Inc. 380 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10017. All rights reserved, printed in the U.S.A. Protection secured under the Universal and Pan American Copyright Conventions. Reproduction or use of editorial or pictorial content in any manner without express permission is prohibited. All submissions must include a self-addressed, stamped envelope; the publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Second class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. POSTMASTER, send form 3579 to IAsfm, Box 1933, Marion OH 43306. In Canada return to 625 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario N8Y3L1, ISSN 0162-2188.

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORIAL

by Isaac Asimov

THE FACES OF SCIENCE FICTION

Some months ago, a young woman managed to talk me into submitting to a photograph session. This is always a hard thing to get me to do. I am perfectly willing to be snapped when I am doing something else. People can (and do) photograph me endlessly at conventions, and I am not disturbed if they do so while I am speaking. Even the sudden gleam of flash bulbs (provided I am not looking directly at them) fails to distract me.

However, a photographic *session* is another thing. No matter what they promise, photographers are bound to take up an hour of my time, during which I must sit, stand, recline, look grave, smile, all on order. I hate it. And no matter what they promise, they eventually want to move the furniture in my office or my living room, which I hate even more.

And most hateful is the sudden flash of inspiration and the cry, "Hey, let's get out all your books and pile them up impressively and you stand next to the pile." *Twice* I allowed myself to be talked into that, first by *People* and again by *Time*. In each case there was a long argument and I let myself be overridden because I didn't have the heart (or the strength of purpose) to risk losing a favorable notice in outlets of such magnitude. But never again!

I finally allowed the photographic session I am talking about through the intercession of someone who was a friend of both myself and the photographer, and because I felt an interest in the photographer's purpose. She was going to prepare a book entitled *The Faces of Science Fiction* and it would feature the photographs she was taking of 75 different science fiction writers. I told myself that perhaps I shouldn't be excluded.

Yesterday, I received a letter from her. She as thinking of putting my face on the cover but needed a "stronger photograph" of me and so she wanted a second session. I refused categorically, partly because I don't want to go through another session, and partly because I'm not sure I want to be on the cover.

No, it's not modesty. I haven't a modest bone in my body—at least when it comes to my role in science fiction.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY

The author of the bestselling

MISTS OF AVALON

(OVER 100,000 HARDCOVER COPIES IN PRINT!)

COMES A NOVEL OF DARK MAGIC AND ANCIENT BETRAYAL

Web of Darkness

HER NEXT BESTSELLER— FROM A BRAND-NEW SOURCE!

BAEN BOOKS

The Future Is NOW!

AUGUST
0-671-55898-6 $3.50
27-copy floor display:
0-671-90029-3 $94.50

Distributed by Simon & Schuster
Mass Merchandise Sales Company
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, New York 10020

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I have been writing science fiction now for 45 years and on January 9, 1989, assuming I continue to survive, I will celebrate the Golden Anniversary of the first appearance of one of my stories in a science fiction magazine. Since then I have never quit the scene for any perceptible length of time. Even during the '60s and '70s, when my production of science fiction was at a low ebb, I managed to turn out a Hugo-winning novel, a number of short story collections and anthologies, several dozen new short stories, and a monthly essay in our esteemed competitor *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. What's more, all my earlier novels stayed in print in one form or another and remained available to science fiction readers.

Most important of all, I was involved with *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, an issue of which you are holding and which is the most successful new science fiction magazine to have appeared over a period of three decades.

Then, when I increased my science fiction output once more in the '80s, I wrote *Foundation's Edge*, which hit the bestseller lists, remained on them for half a year, and which then won the Hugo. Now I have published *The Robots of Dawn*, the third book of the Lije Baley trilogy, which, on the very day I write this, has appeared in 7th place on the New York *Times* best-seller list.

So I haven't much to be legitimately modest about as far as my science fiction is concerned, and false modesty is disgusting.

But there it ends. I'm proud of what I have *produced*, but not of *me*. My face isn't the face of science fiction (and neither are those of Bob Heinlein, Arthur Clarke, or Ray Bradbury.) My *stories*, and those of several hundred other writers, are the face of science fiction.

To put it as briefly as I can, I'm against personality cults even when I'm the beneficiary.

To some extent, an emphasis on the writer rather than the story cannot be avoided. The name of the writer *must* be placed on the story, if only as a legitimate guide to the reader. Each writer turns out material characteristic of himself and each writer, insofar as he is reasonably uniform in the style and nature of his stories, consistently pleases some readers and not others. Most serious readers will therefore search out the work of certain writers because they know that these will almost certainly please them, and it is only reasonable to give them guidelines of this sort.

Then, too, if a particular writer is valued by an unusually large fraction of the readership, a magazine (which is, after all, a commercial venture, and must earn money) is bound to try to obtain stories by that writer and put his name in large letters on the cover as a way of improving its circulation.

And there *that* should end.

The writer's name serves the purpose of a brand-name or a trademark. It helps the reader find what he wants and it can, in that way, increase the financial welfare of a popular writer. For that reason, writers are conscious of the recognition value of their names

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WHEN YOU LIVE SCIENCE FICTION
'S NO LONGER A GAME—IT'S AN ADVENTURE
PACE COLONY RESCUE®
The Boardgame of The Future
by the people who create the adventure
and let YOU live it!
e through the craggy corridors of the asteroid
desperate mission to save human life and
e a fortune in Empirical Treasure. Test your skill
courage against other
ce-cruisers to
h the core
ne asteroid
arch of
key to
ck the
oids
On your journey be prepared to encounter:
- Laser Battles
- Negative Ion Webs
- Invisible Mines
- Fatal Collisions
- Abandoned Fuel Depots
- And much more . . .
Jay.d. Mac Enterprizes
P.O. Box 11349 Eugene, Oregon 97440
Please send me _____ edition(s) of Space Colony Rescue at $13.95 each (add $2.00 for shipping and handling).
Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Allow four to six weeks for delivery.
An innerspace journey in outerspace

and I grow petulant when my name is misspelled.

But what have faces got to do with it? The welfare of actors and, to a large extent, contemporary politicians, depend upon public approval of their appearance, but let us thank our fates that writers don't have to be subjected to that. What a horrible existence it would be for me if I had to apply shoepolish to my white muttonchops in order to maintain a spurious appearance of youth.

(I am told, now and then, "You would look twenty years younger, Isaac, if you shaved off your sideburns." To which my answer always is "Who wants to look a little over ten?")

Don't get me wrong. I'm sure that the photographer's book will be interesting to many people who will be curious to see what the people who write the stories look like, but I certainly hope that that won't be, either now or ever, a substitute for finding out what the people who write the stories *write* like.

In fact, my disapproval of personality cults, extends even to a feeling of dissatisfaction over the increasing tendency in our field to hand out awards for this and that. I am not only intensely dissatisfied with this when I am passed over for one, but I am even a bit dissatisfied when I win.

For instance, I was delighted when *Foundation's Edge* won the Hugo in Baltimore. For one thing, I was not only up against good novels by Clarke and by Heinlein (it was the first time, ever, that the "Big Three" were in direction competition) but I was also being measured against novels by such newer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

powerhouses as Wolfe and Cherryh, so it was clearly a Big Thing to win the award and I couldn't help feel triumphant.

But it took me a little while to get up to the platform and that gave me time to think.

After all, who is to say that my book was "better" than the next person's. Measurements in the literary field are not like those in a horse-race where a stop-watch and a camera at the finish line can serve as objective decision-makers. Judgment of quality in books is never absolute in this sense and can't ever be. The most we can say is that a number of people felt as though they had enjoyed one book more than another. But the reason for the preference might depend on extraneous matters. They might have read one book when they were feeling well and the other when they were feeling lousy. And by what right do we think that this person or that, simply by virtue of knowing how to read, is an adequate judge of quality?

And even if a large number were convinced that they enjoyed this book more than any other, so what? (As a matter of fact, though I didn't know it at the time I seized my Hugo with both hands, I had received somewhat fewer first place votes than Cherryh got, but I picked up enough second and third place votes to come out a bit ahead in the end, according to the system used in counting the Hugo ballots. What that proves I haven't the faintest idea.)

By the time I got to the platform, then, I had decided that winning the Hugo was a pleasure, but was

ISAAC ASIMOV: Editorial Director
SHAWNA McCARTHY: Editor
SHEILA WILLIAMS: Associate Editor
AMY STOUT: Editorial Assistant
RALPH RUBINO: Corporate Art Director
GERRY HAWKINS: Associate Art Director
TERRI CZECZKO: Art Editor
MARIANNE WELDON: Associate Designer
CARL BARTEE: Director of Manufacturing
CAROLE DIXON: Production Manager
LAUREN C. COUNCIL: Production Assistant
CYNTHIA MANSON: Subsidiary Rights Manager
BARBARA BAZYN: Permissions & Contracts Manager
MICHAEL DILLON: Circulation Director Retail Marketing
PAUL PEARSON: Newsstand Operations Manager
KATHY TULLY-CESTARO: Circulation Manager Subscriptions
WILLIAM F. BATTISTA: Advertising Director
JAMIE FILLON: Advertising Manager
IRENE BOZOKI: Classified Advertising Manager

ADVERTISING OFFICES
NEW YORK
(212) 557-9100

CHICAGO
(312) 346-0712

LOS ANGELES
(213) 795-3114

JOEL DAVIS
President and Publisher

LEONARD F. PINTO
Vice President
&
General Manager

CAROLE SINCLAIR
Vice President
Marketing-Editorial

LEONARD H. HABAS
Vice President
Circulation

FRED EDINGER
Vice President
Finance

Please do not send us your manuscript until you've gotten a copy of our manuscript guidelines. To obtain this, send us a self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope (what stationery stores call a number 10 envelope), and a note requesting this information. The address for this and for all editorial correspondence is *IAsfm*, Davis Publications, Inc. 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017. While we're always looking for new writers, please, in the interest of time-saving, find out what we're looking for, and how to prepare it, before submitting your story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not important compared to certain other things, and I proceeded to say so. I don't remember the exact words I used, but this was the essence:

"Here I am holding the Hugo, and glad of it. I'm delighted I've got it and I'm not letting go of it, but I don't for one minute think of it as peculiarly mine or as belonging to me for anything I did.

"There is a siblinghood of science fiction, and all of us, writers and readers alike, are engaged in an important task. We are trying to look into the face of change and adjust to it. We are trying to consider the various futures our society faces, so that we might choose among them, and decide on what policies we think ought to be followed to bring the future of choice to pass.

"We are the only form of popular culture that undertakes this task—and for that we all deserve a Hugo every year. I hold one of the Hugos awarded this year but only as a representative for all of us. I am the caretaker, not the winner. Science fiction is the winner." ●

ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

CONGRATULATES THE WINNERS OF THE 1983 NEBULA AWARDS

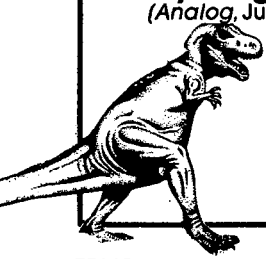
given by the Science Fiction Writers of America:

Best Novelette
"Blood Music," by Greg Bear
(*Analog*, June 1983)

Best Novel
***Startide Rising*, by David Brin**
(Excerpted as "The Tides of Kithrup" *Analog*, May 1981)

Best Novella
"Hardfought," by Greg Bear
(*IAsfm*, February 1983)

Best Short Story
"The Peacemaker," by Gardner Dozois
(*IAsfm*, August 1983)



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LETTERS

Dear Editors:

I have a suggestion for Joel Rosenberg and other science fiction writers who would like expert scientific advice, but don't want to pay stiff consultation fees: Write up your question and send it to the appropriate department of a good college or university. Although the experts on the faculty there may not devote much of their personal time to solving your problem, they will probably insure that you get an adequate and accurate response.

When I was an undergraduate at Caltech, it was common for the physics professors to have their third and fourth-year students answer letters the department had received. It gave the students an opportunity to use what they were learning; it improved public relations for the school; and the professors were able to perform a public service for no more cost to themselves than the trouble of checking the students' answers.

Although the undergraduates at the top schools are not proven experts like Steven Hawking or Dr. Asimov, they are likely to be bright and well-informed. Since what a writer often needs is a clear exposition of something already known, or a solution to an intermediate-level problem, and not a masterpiece of original research, why should he pay a premium for the skills of an established scientist? The answers to his questions are probably within the competence of a good student guided by an expert.

I hope Mr. Rosenberg takes my suggestion and writes to the university of his choice. Just think: he might get for free now what he won't be able to afford in a few years. Even Dr. Asimov was once an undergraduate!

Sincerely,

Kim Thomas
18 Ironwood Court
Lafayette, IN 47906

An excellent idea! And I was indeed once an undergraduate—at just about the time I published my first science fiction story. Heavens, that was a long time ago considering what a young fellow I am.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

When I was a beginning high school English teacher, some of my students introduced me to science fiction. It was a new literary world of imagination and creativity for me and I have continued to read it. Eventually I resigned to become a full time mother. When my older child was in fourth grade, I began

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to introduce him to science fiction. In seven years he has become a well-read science fiction fan, so there are two scifi readers at our house.

When *IAsfm* began publication, I was one of the first subscribers. As I recognized the quality of the material you published, I was pleased to let my son read the magazine, too.

In the last few months there has been a definite trend toward more sex but it was not adversely affecting the overall quality of the stories until the last two issues (Dec. and Mid-Dec.). Sex became the center of the stories instead of scientific creativity or imagination. "Remembering Siri," "Her Furry Face," "The Castrati of Womensa," and "Reasonable Doubt" would have been improved by creative plotting and more scientific detail. Until these issues I had believed that the writers for *IAsfm* had too much wit and intelligence to be caught dumping sex into a story for shock value.

I am disappointed by these recent directions. You, however, may find an increase in sales by publishing blatantly sexual stories, but I suspect you will also lose a few long term subscribers at renewal time. I'll be one you lose for I have expected quality material for my money and received it, until recently.

I'm sorry to be leaving your readership, but I am not canceling my subscription now in hopes that enough other people complain that you reconsider the direction the magazine is following. Since I know it takes several months to put a story into print, I'll wait to see

Computer software company president Craig Jensen uses the book Dianetics *in his life and work.*

DIANETICS™ Technology Gave Me a Positive Outlook On Life.

By Craig Jensen

Since I read L. Ron Hubbard's *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health,* I have applied it literally every day of my life. The technology in this book is something that affects the way I confront the world, the way I deal with people and the way I handle my work.

Dianetics technology really works!

Put Joy into Living: Read *Dianetics*

Only $3.95 wherever paperbacks are sold, or use the order form below and get Dianetics *today!*

Bridge Publications, Inc.
Dept AA 884
1414 North Catalina Street
Los Angeles, CA. 90027-9990

Please send my copy of *Dianetics* for $3.95 (add $1.00 for shipping & handling). California residents add 6.5% tax.

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____
STATE/ZIP _____
Master Card ☐ Card # _____
or VISA ☐ Expires _____

Copyright © 1985 by Bridge Publications, Inc.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what editorial decisions will be made.

Sincerely yours,

Marcia Backos
Painesville, OH

There's difficulty here. Sex is part of the human condition and in contemporary literature it simply can't be ignored. However, we try to draw the line at sexploitation, but choose stories that use it to make some important point. It's difficult to judge sometimes where the line is, and some readers may not always agree with us, but we try hard, and circulation is *going up, because (my theory) Shawna's policies are good ones.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

The success of the magazine you now edit has impressed me from the first issue, both in science fiction and as a business venture. The one lasting reservation I had was with an inescapably adolescent atmosphere. Your mid-December issue declares the end of that situation. If you don't have any asbestos mail sacks, you may have to order a couple. It seemed like a good idea to write, too, saying

Thank you,

Neil Rest
Chicago, IL

If the magazine were left entirely in my hands, it would probably be a bit adolescent (because of my irrepressible youth). That's why I leave it in the capable hands of the beauteous Shawna.

Isaac Asimov

Dear Shawna, Doc, and you all,

I attended my first science fiction convention last weekend in Portland, Oregon. Octavia Butler was the guest of honor. If you don't know it already, Octavia is a wonderful person, very congenial.

I'm not fortunate enough to have read her novels yet, but after reading her short story "Speech Sounds" in the Mid-December *Asimov's*, I was very impressed with her writing. During the opening ceremonies of OryCon, she read from one of her novels, then Terry Carr did a little Q&A interview with her about her life in L.A. and her writing.

Fortunately for me, a couple of times during the con, I had the opportunity to talk casually with her. Needless to say, I'm very impressed with the lady. She has a permanent fan here, in addition to many others.

Since this was my first con, I wasn't very familiar with how things were done. It seemed to me everything I was interested in seeing or hearing was all scheduled during the same hours. For instance, how do you choose between readings by Kate Wilhelm and a debate on the "High Frontier Project" presented by the L5 Society?

I suggested to my wife, Jennifer, that she attend one thing while I attend another, but she would have none of that (I had just spent the last three months at Ft. Knox, Kentucky, and she wouldn't let me out of her sight the whole con).

Anyway, we did get to hear some great readings from M. K. Wren and Paul Edwin Zimmer.

I hope this doesn't sound like an ad. It's just that after reading science fiction and heroic adventure

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tune in tonight as ordinary, desperate folks like you risk *eternal damnation* to strike a bargain with the *Prince of Darkness* and swap their souls for *big prizes* and *cash!*.

12:00 Midnight WNBS-TV

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

so long, and hearing about cons and fandom from you people back East, I guess I felt meeting writers was out of my reach. It's nice to know that it is not.

Thanks to you and Erwin Strauss for the convention calendar each month and to Shawna for bringing us such great SF.

Yours,

Guy L. Pace
Yakima, WA

Remember, Mr. Pace, science fiction conventions can be addictive, although in these days of giant conventions, you have to be young and strong to stand the pace of going from one part to another.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editors,

I've been reading *IAsfm* for several years and approve of the direction it's going. There seem to be fewer gimmicks and more of a concentration on quality. I basically find this to be true of current SF in general.

Perhaps SF is now at a transition point. Science has gone so far and is so complex that it's difficult for those of us who aren't blessed with an education concentrated in the sciences to use it as the basis of our work. Perhaps this partly accounts for all the dungeons and dragons.

My taste does not go in the direction of dungeons and dragons, but I have found that "hard" SF can sometimes amount to little more than technological blueprints, interesting only to technologists. I much prefer writers that concentrate on the human condition using literary excellence. There's plenty of that in SF. Writers such as the big three, Wells, Weinbaum, and Sturgeon, or more current ones like Michael Bishop, Barry Longyear, and *Analog's* Ray Brown.

This seems to be the direction *IAsfm* is going. I hope so anyway.

Here are a few other aspects of the magazine I would like to comment on. I like its basic format and design. There are some parts I don't care for, such as the crossword puzzles and gaming articles, but I'm sure many other people do. It arrives in the mail undamaged and the label peels off without disfiguring the cover too much. One complaint I do have is there's too damn many ads and misprints.

In the letters column of the Sept. issue you said that you buy what appeals to you personally. That's rather difficult to aim for. Furthermore, I find it difficult and unsavory to write what doesn't have meaning to me. So I try to write material that I can be proud of and will work in the magazine.

While writing this story I went back and reread most of the Sept. issue. I think it's one of your best yet, along with the Sept. '82 issue. Pamela Sargent's "Heavenly Flowers" is very, very powerful. I also enjoyed MacQuarrie's "Visitors" which was quite choicely done. I think something about it inspired my story. (By the way, there's nothing SF about "Visitors." Big hairy deal.)

I also read *The Early Asimov* and thoroughly enjoyed reading the good doctor's first scribblings and all the troubles he went through to get published. And if *he* had a rough time—I guess I won't give up hope.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fifteen years after Doomsday...
Slaughter is casual entertainment.
Murder is expected.
Survival is a vicious game.
And nobody plays it better than...
TRAVELER
Cruising the ruins of America, he's the hero of the new series for men who crave action—no matter what the future brings. Look for TRAVELER books now, just $2.25 each wherever paperbacks are sold.
TRAVELER
FIRST, YOU FIGHT
Dell

This part is for the good doctor, whom I assume is reading this letter. When people talk about your work that is their favorite, they never mention *The Gods Themselves,* which I think is one of your best. It has the kind of vision and depth that I attribute to the best of Clarke. In your story behind the Foundation novels you mentioned that you couldn't understand why that series was so popular. You said that it had little action but lots of ideas. Perhaps that is why they are popular. Interest in suspense material dies out quickly, but something that enhances the quality of our lives here and now just stays with us.

So much for everything. Please

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

keep writing good stuff and putting out a good magazine.
Sincerely,

Kent Martens
Ferndale, WA

Every once in a while, someone does mention The Gods Themselves. *After all, it did win both the Hugo and the Nebula. What you say about ideas hits home, but I'm afraid that if they ever do the* Foundation *on the visual media, the ideas will be dumped in favor of special effects.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov, Shawna, *et al.*,

I have been a loyal subscriber for a few years now, eagerly reading each beloved issue at one sitting. Now, I am faced with a peculiar dilemma.

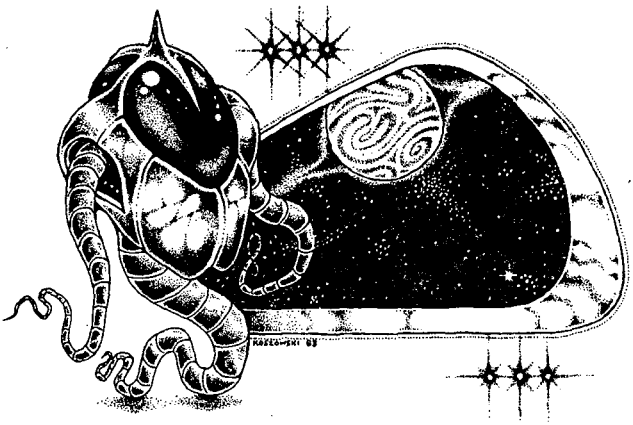
A rather low income (or an almost non-existent one) has forced my wife and me to live in a very small house, with absolutely *no* room for our books, magazines, etc. What am I going to do about my steadily growing collection of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine?* I will *not* part with it, but I have nowhere to store it. (Without it, I would doubtlessly go insane, unable to find anything else to read in this backward region where the nearest decent bookstore is fifty miles away.) Maybe you or your readers have a suggestion? Please hurry, as the tunnel I've dug through the back-issues of my magazines to the bedroom is rapidly shrinking, and judging by the look in my beautiful wife's eyes, I'll be sleeping on the couch (alone!) long before it has closed completely.

Yours in Haste,

Jeff Evans
Rt. 1 Box 151
Cadwell, GA 31009

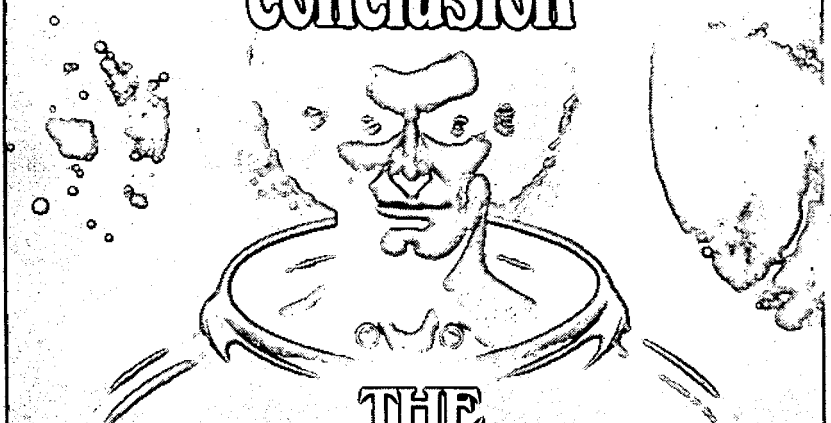
You can't be saving only Asimov's. *Throw out everything else. (Except my books, if you have any.)*

—Isaac Asimov



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Now the epic saga comes to its triumphant conclusion



THE ADVERSARY

JULIAN MAY

The fourth and culminating volume in the classic science fiction series is "A stunning grand finale to this richly inventive series."
—Elton Elliott, *Science Fiction Review*

"Julian May has made a new and fresh masterwork of the genre and has irrevocably placed herself among the great of fantasy and science fiction."
—Baird Searles, *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*

"THE ADVERSARY assures her saga a lasting place among science fiction classics."—Tom Clareson, *Extrapolitan*

Unveiled at WorldCon, special signed and numbered boxed set of the Pliocene Exile Series, including Volume V, *A Pliocene Companion*.

The Saga of the Pliocene Exile: ◘ THE MANY-COLORED LAND, Vol. I ◘ THE GOLDEN TORC, Vol. II ◘ THE NONBORN KING, Vol. III ◘ THE ADVERSARY, Vol. IV

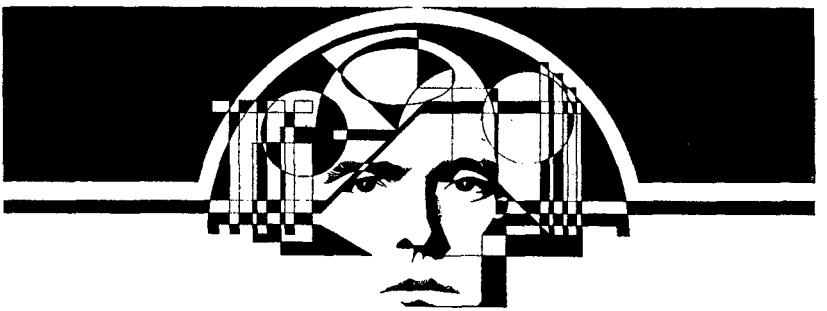
AT BOOKSTORES NOW

Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108

© Houghton Mifflin Company 1984
LICENSED FOR
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MARTIN GARDNER

AROUND THE SOLAR SYSTEM



This month we examine a fantastic mathematical magic trick. I will present it as a puzzle—why does it always work?—but of course you can demonstrate it to friends as an amazing feat of ESP.

To the audience, this is how the trick appears. While your back is turned, someone is asked to put a dime on any of the nine squares shown in the illustration. Without turning around, you give instructions for moving the dime about at random over the matrix, as if it were a spaceship touring the solar system. As these random moves are made, you keep blocking off certain cells by directing that pennies be placed on them. Finally, eight cells are occupied by pennies. With your back still turned, you can name the planet on which the "spaceship" came to rest.

Pause at this point and see that you have on hand a dime and eight pennies. Instead of pennies you can use buttons, checkers, or anything else that will serve as counters. I will now assume the role of magician, while you assume the role of spectator.

Select any one of the nine cells and put the dime on it. This is a completely free choice on your part, and obviously I have no way of knowing what choice you made. When you move the dime according to my instructions, you must move it one cell at a time in any horizontal or vertical direction. *No diagonal moves are allowed.* At each move you spell a letter in the name on the cell where you first put the dime. For example, if you start on Mars you spell M-A-R-S, moving the dime one square east, west, north, or south at random, one move for each letter.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When you finish spelling the name on the starting square, put a penny on Venus. I am, of course, betting that no matter where you began, or how you moved the dime, it will not have come to rest on Venus.

From now on, at each step of your "tour" of the solar system, you move the "spaceship" just seven times, regardless of the name on the cell. These moves are made randomly, as before, but are confined to unoccupied cells. The number of these vacant squares will become fewer and fewer as more and more pennies go on the matrix.

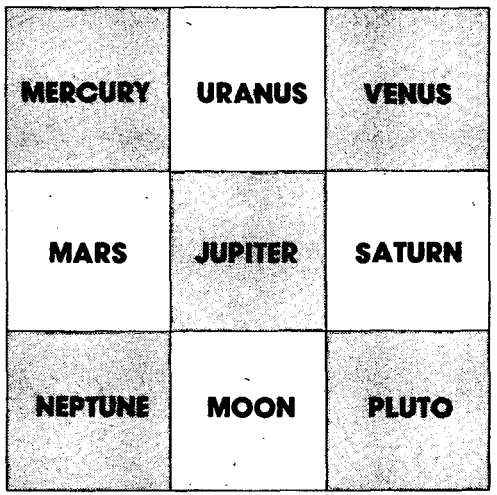


Figure 1

After making seven moves, put a penny on Mars.

Move seven times. Put a penny on Mercury. As New York City's mayor Ed Koch likes to say, "How'm I doin'?" Are all the pennies landing on vacant cells?

Move seven times. Put a penny on Uranus.

Move seven times. Put a penny on Neptune.

Move seven times. Put a penny on Saturn.

Move seven times. Put a penny on Jupiter.

Move seven times. Put a penny on the Moon.

If you followed instructions correctly, the dime should now be on Pluto!

When you show the trick to someone, turn your back while you give the above instructions. If you like, you can add to the mystery by allowing the spectator, at any time, to move by spelling S-E-V-E-N instead of counting seven. After he puts a penny on the moon, you can tell him, without turning around to look, that his dime is on Pluto.

Why does the trick always work? The answer, on page 50, will introduce you to the concept of "parity." It is a concept of enormous importance both in combinatorial mathematics and in modern particle physics.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A monumental epic of prehistory

WEST OF EDEN is the story of the tragic, inevitable clash between the Yilane, cold-blooded intelligent reptiles who have dominated the earth, and the Tanu, a warm-blooded hunting clan of humans like ourselves who are destined to oppose them. The compelling saga of the young human warrior who leads his people against their ancient enemy, WEST OF EDEN is the masterwork of the career of a brilliantly imaginative writer.

"WEST OF EDEN is surely Harry Harrison's best novel since MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM! and probably the best sf novel ever done on the confrontation of human and saurian intelligence. The biological extrapolation manages to be utterly extreme and utterly convincing at the same time, and the saurian civilization is done in the finest traditions of hard science fiction." —**Norman Spinrad**

"One of the most enjoyable books I've read in years, in or out of science fiction. No one has ever created an alien culture so complete and fascinating...an astonishing piece of work."—**Joe Haldeman**

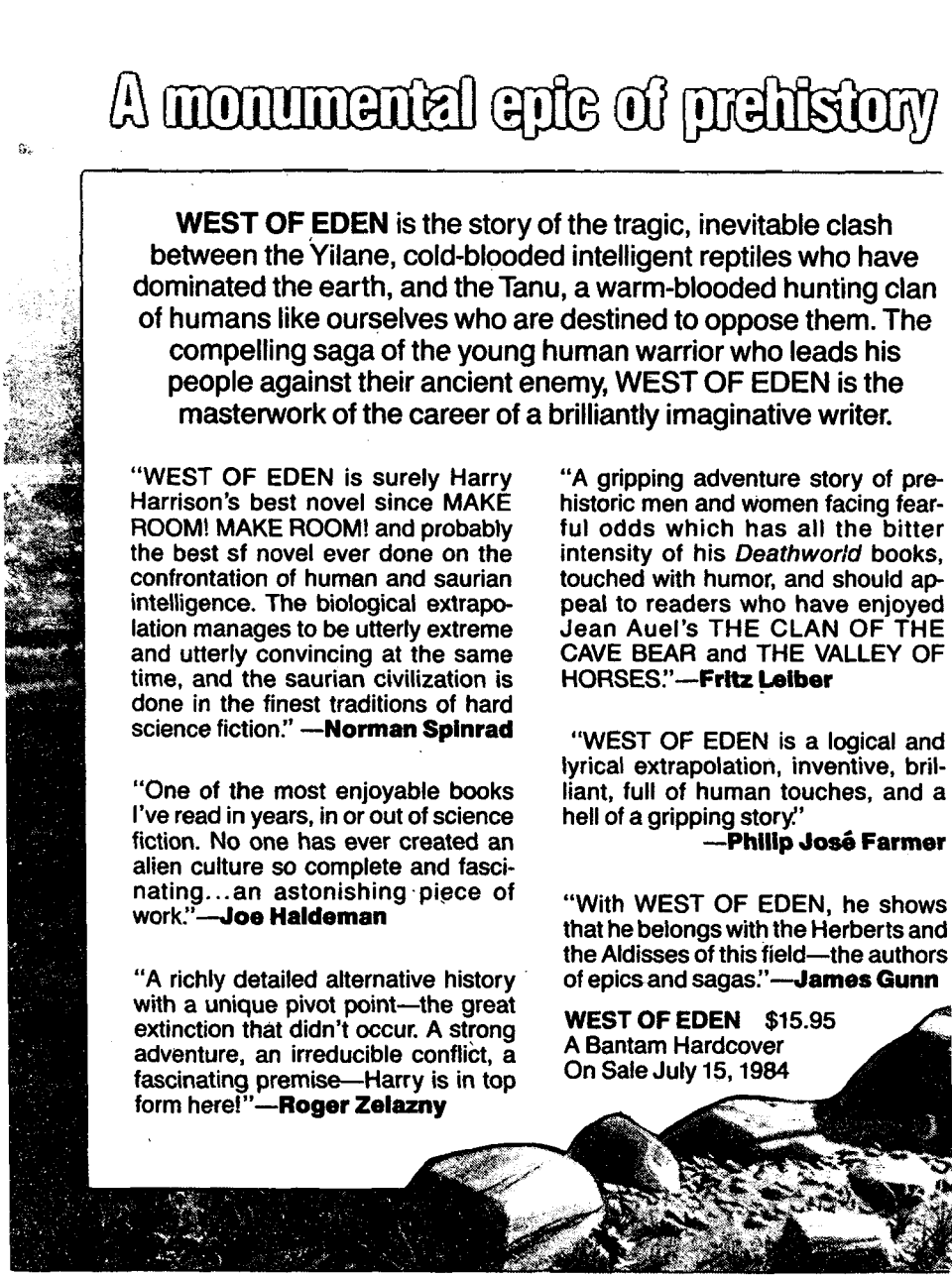
"A richly detailed alternative history with a unique pivot point—the great extinction that didn't occur. A strong adventure, an irreducible conflict, a fascinating premise—Harry is in top form here!"—**Roger Zelazny**

"A gripping adventure story of prehistoric men and women facing fearful odds which has all the bitter intensity of his *Deathworld* books, touched with humor, and should appeal to readers who have enjoyed Jean Auel's THE CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR and THE VALLEY OF HORSES."—**Fritz Leiber**

"WEST OF EDEN is a logical and lyrical extrapolation, inventive, brilliant, full of human touches, and a hell of a gripping story."
—**Philip José Farmer**

"With WEST OF EDEN, he shows that he belongs with the Herberts and the Aldisses of this field—the authors of epics and sagas."—**James Gunn**

WEST OF EDEN $15.95
A Bantam Hardcover
On Sale July 15, 1984



SF&F **Bantam Science Fiction and**

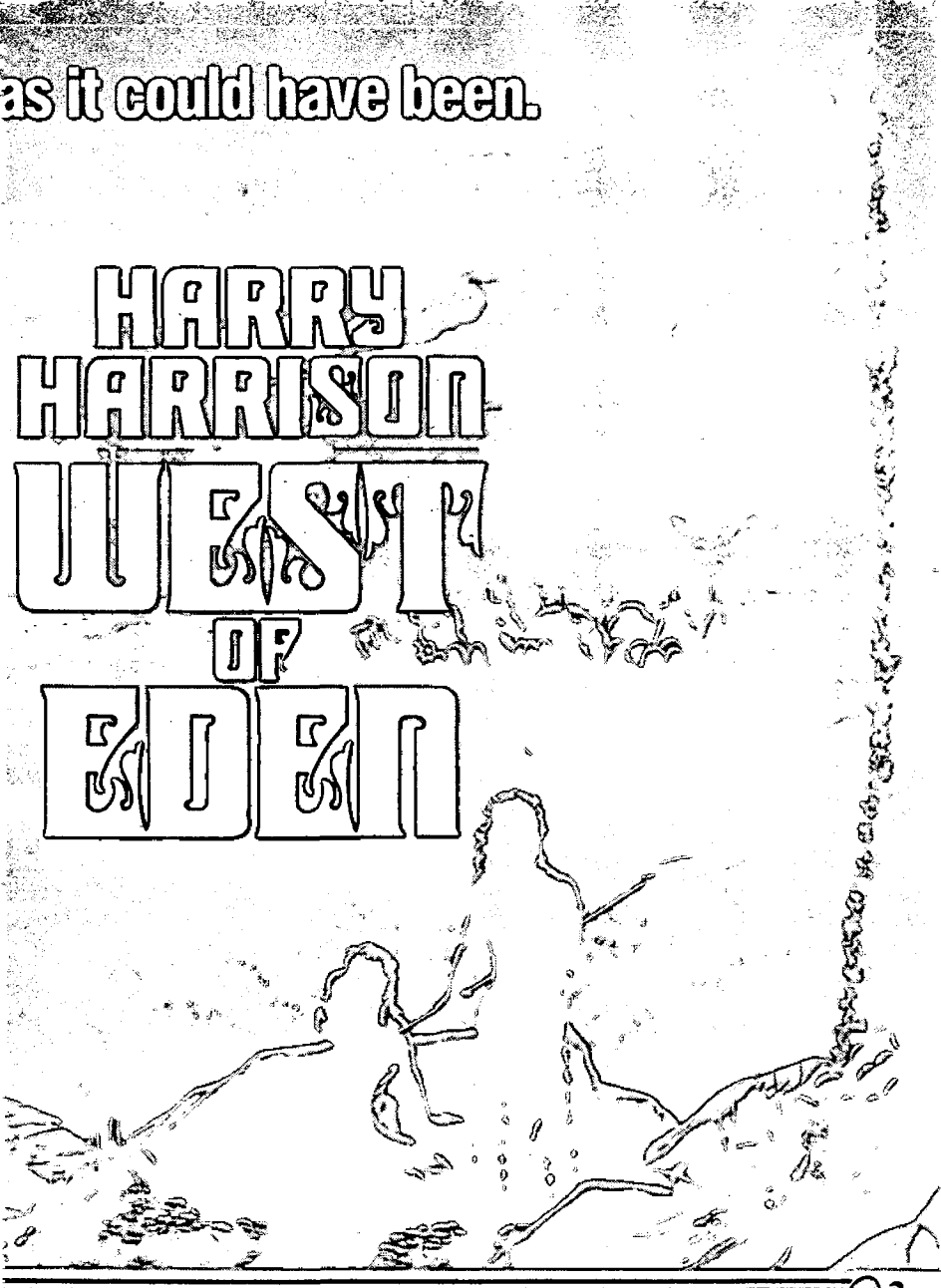
BANTAM BOOKS, INC., 666 Fifth Avenue, New York 10103

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as it could have been.

HARRY HARRISON

WEST OF EDEN



Fantasy: The Best of All Possible Worlds.

BANTAM BOOKS CANADA, INC., 60 St. Clair Avenue East, Suite 601, Toronto, Ontario M4T 1N5

RELEASED FOR UNRESTRICTED

GAMING

by Dana Lombardy

A revised second edition of *Gamma World*®, TSR's science fantasy role-playing game, is available ($12 at your local store, or direct from TSR Inc., Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI 53147). In fact, the re-design has been so extensive it should be considered a new game.

Gamma World® adventures are set in 25th century America. It's a land of radioactive wastes populated by weird and powerful mutants. This is the result of the "Social Wars" of the early 24th century that destroyed Earth's civilizations and erased all knowledge of the time before the wars. The land itself was changed by the lasers, atomic weapons, chemical and biological agents unleashed. More importantly, only one in 5,000 humans survived this upheaval. Those that struggled through the "Black Years" discover they now share the planet with mutated animals and humans. Physical mutations were only one change. Some plants and animals have acquired telepathy and other mental abilities. The animals are bigger, smarter, and meaner.

A few settlements lie scattered across the continent—last refuges of humans in a hostile environment. Many have joined together for protection in tribes, clans, and feudal states. Secret brotherhoods or cryptic alliances of humans, animals, and mutants vie with each other for control of what remains after the holocaust. This is the world you enter as a player in *Gamma World*®.

Like TSR's *Dungeons & Dragons*® role-playing game, you "make-believe" as one or more characters in an adventure you create, or buy as one of the ready-to-play modules available. A typical adventure could take as little as an hour or two to play, or continue over days or weeks as a series of interconnected adventures in a campaign. The most fun is with a referee who directs the game and from three to eight players.

Gamma World® comes with a 64-page rules book outlining the background of the world, how to create your characters, how to determine movement and combat, encounters with hazards and non-player characters (controlled by the referee), and a statistics sheet to keep track of your character.

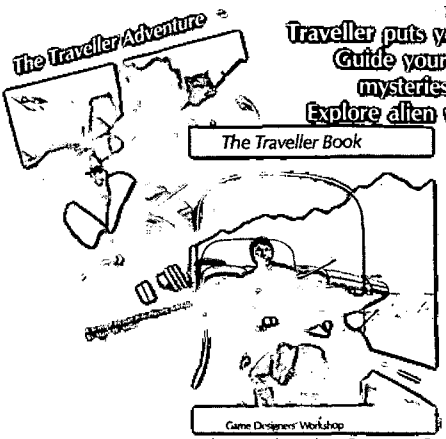
Each character has six attributes or dice-acquired abilities. These are: mental strength (the ability to control mental energies in combat); intelligence (a measure of intellect, logic, etc.); dexterity (speed and reaction agility); charisma (ability to influence non-player characters' — NPC — reactions);

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Put yourself in the story!

TRAVELLER®

Science-Fiction Adventure in the Far Future



Traveller puts you in the middle of the action! Guide your favorite character through the mysteries and dangers of the far future. Explore alien worlds, puzzle out the enigmas of ancient civilizations, conduct complicated confidence scams, smuggle, build empires, lead revolutions, wage interstellar war . . . the list of science fiction role-playing adventures is as unlimited as your own imagination.

The Traveller Book

Complete rules, background, advice for players and referees, scenarios, and two short adventures.

The Traveller Adventure

A series of interwoven scenarios and adventures among the worlds of the Spinward Marches.

There are more than forty books, boxed sets, modules, supplements, adventures, and games for Traveller, with new material appearing regularly. Traveller is available from better book, game, and hobby retailers around the world.

Game Designers' Workshop

P.O. Box 1646, Bloomington, Illinois 61701

Free catalog on request.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

constitution (ability to withstand damage); and physical strength (ability to perform physical acts involving muscular development).

Each player's character also has a "hit point" score from which points are subtracted every time he or she suffers damage from accidents, physical or mental combat, poisons, radiation, etc. It's possible to rest and heal damage with medicines, but a character can die if placed in difficult situations too often. The object of the game is to keep your character alive from adventure to adventure, acquiring experience, equipment, and artifacts (relics of ancient technology).

This is your chance to actively play-out your alter ego. Role-playing appeals to the Walter Mitty in all of us, and *Gamma World*® offers one of the more bizarre and hostile environments to role-play in.

The game play follows a general pattern of give-and-take between the referee, who knows all the monsters, hazards, etc., the players may encounter, and the players' characters, who try to deduce, run from, or overcome by force the problems presented to them by the referee.

Gamma World® is different from a "pure" SF game, such as *Star Frontiers* since it's not about outer space and advanced technology. Also, the technology in *Gamma World*® is disjointed. You can have a dog-man with a spear fighting alongside a robot with a laser, allied against humanoids with pistols and swords. Unlike fantasy games, such as *D&D*®, there's no magic in *Gamma World*®.

Will your party of adventurers stumble across land sharks or 1.5-meter tall spiders? Will you play a mutated human with two heads, or perhaps a highly-intelligent mutated rabbit? Do the NPCs you've encountered belong to one of the secret societies, such as the Mutationists who are devoted to destroying all pure-strain humans?

If you prefer more straightforward science fiction with known and approximately equal abilities and weapons, then *Gamma World*® may not be for you. It's a topsy-turvy world, where the average pure-strain human is hard-pressed to exist among plants and animals mutated by humanity's wars. But if you like a challenge, and want to role-play something really different—*Gamma World*® could be it. ●

DANA LOMBARDY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A NEW MENACE LURKS IN THE UNIVERSE...

THE ALIEN TRACE

By H.M. Major

Only one gifted empath stood between the menace from the stars — and the destruction of his world! Created by a talented writing duo with years of experience in the science fiction field, here is the first novel in a brand-new Signet science fiction series that will appeal to the many fans of *Spaceways* books, and to anyone who loves fast-paced, action-packed space adventure.

$2.95

SIGNET SCIENCE FICTION

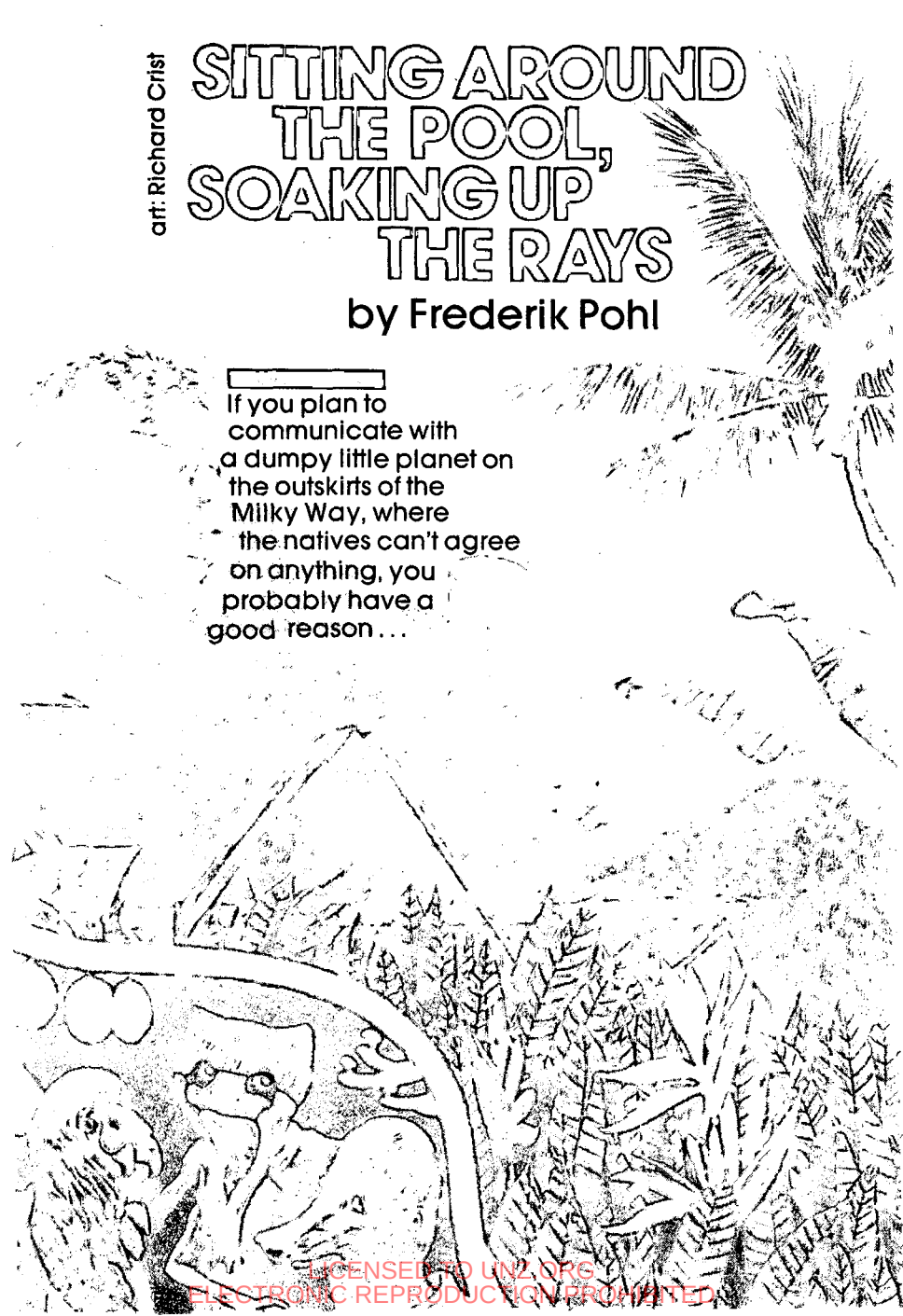
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SITTING AROUND THE POOL, SOAKING UP THE RAYS

art: Richard Crist

by Frederik Pohl

If you plan to communicate with a dumpy little planet on the outskirts of the Milky Way, where the natives can't agree on anything, you probably have a good reason . . .



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I had no way of telling how well the conference was going. None of us did. We didn't understand much of what was being said, and anyway we didn't really know what the issues were in the first place, so the way I tried to judge it was by the amount of yelling. There had been a lot. My head hurt. From that, and from not being allowed even a drink of water for three and a half straight hours, and from a lot of other things, too. So I came out of the Liliuokalani Ballroom feeling poorly and looking worse, lifting each foot in turn in that circular Howdy-Doody prance my boss favors, and the Maui sun hit me right in the face. I blinked. I stumbled. And all of a sudden the boss whispered, "Later," and left me on my own. That's the way it always was, take over without warning and without warning take off.

So I had some slack time. The first thing I did, of course, was pee. You do that when you can, whenever you get a chance; you learn that right away. Then I headed for the pool. Marc Socul was coming toward me. If I have a real friend among the bunch at the Makele Motel—male friend, anyway—Marc is it. But he went by me without a word, slithering along like a mime doing serpents; there was no point in talking to him and I didn't try.

Was hot in the sun. There were a hundred and forty of us at the motel, but you'd never know it from the skimpy showing around the pool. When we're not working we tend to run and hide somewhere, at least during the first few weeks. The Makele Motel is built on the side of a hill, in the shape of a U, with big staggered rooms going down toward the ocean and the wings of the building surrounding the palm trees and the pool and the sun deck and the winding carp stream and the kerosene flares they still light up with torches every sundown, beating out time on a drum as the beach boys race from flare to flare. Pretty much it's the way it was in civilian days, when tourists paid a hundred and sixty dollars a day for the rooms and lanais and more than that in the bar. Doesn't cost us a thing. Especially the bar doesn't, since they closed it down. I was hoping to find Lois around the pool, but she was probably busy—or at least absent—so I sat down on a beach chair and threw my terrycloth robe off to catch some sun. The one thing I definitely expected to gain out of this was a tan.

Alice leaned over in her predatory way and said, "How about it, Ben, you want to play some bridge?" Alice is a nice enough old lady, but she's over seventy and she didn't really look good in a deep-cut one-piece bathing suit. She is also someone I don't particularly want to play cards with. She's a professional card hustler—or was—took her retirement from the math department at Georgia Tech and went out to beat the blackjack dealers in Vegas. She did it very well, too, until she got recruited. So I turned her down, as she expected I would. She settled for backgammon with sad, sorry little Elsa McKee, our newest, and unhappiest, recruit.

A shadow fell over me from behind.

LICENSED TO JIVE.COM
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I jumped up and turned around and yelled, "Don't do that!" It wasn't anyone to worry about. It was just Arnold, who is one of our doctors. All he wanted was to check me out, but he should have known better than to startle me.

"Sorry," he said. He probably was. "Just hold still." He stethoscoped me and pulsed me and pulled down one eyelid to look at the broken veins. "How are you feeling, Ben?" he asked.

"Hungry," I said at random, and he nodded and snapped his fingers for a poolside waiter and told me I was all right. Shows how much he knows. Arnold doesn't really like us much. Neither do the waiters or the maids or the guards—when you come right down to it I wouldn't even say we like ourselves a whole bunch—but of course they're afraid to let anything go wrong with us. When the waiter rushed up to offer me the menu, the poor son of a bitch was trembling.

The menu was about a yard tall and printed on what felt like plush. I tried to hold it so the sun glare didn't make me squint while I studied every item. It all looked very good.

The thing I've noticed abut my life is that I almost always get everything I want, but only when I either can't take advantage of it or don't want it any more. This was a case of Category A. Before I was recruited, I was a tech-manual compiler for an electronics company in Redondo Beach. Twenty-two thousand dollars a year when I was working, which wasn't always, and a ninety thousand dollar mortgage to pay off. A big Saturday night date for me was Alaskan king crab legs at the nearest Red Lobster Inn. And here the beach boy was handing me Mr. Lucullus's personal menu, pressed duck and mahimahi and Chateaubriand, and all of it free—*free*! We live like kings, we servants of the stars, only I didn't know if I'd get a chance to eat it if I ordered it. So I asked what was ready right that minute.

"Roast beef, mashed potatoes, salad," he said without looking me in the eye. Afraid of what he might see. He was prepared to go on but I said that would do, with a lot of fresh orange juice. The doctor looked up from tapping Elsa's sweet, skinny little knee and nodded approval. Arnold is always after us about vitamins. He convinced me he was right when Jack Marcantonio fell over right in the middle of a screaming session with another delegate in the Sandalwood Room. They had to take him away. Arnold told us later that he had been D.O.A. at the hospital. Jack had been getting most of his calories from bourbon, and right after that they closed the Whaler Bar.

I dialed Lois's room on the poolside phone; no answer, so I leaned back to work on my tan, sort of hoping I would fall asleep, but across the pool Walter and Felice were keeping me awake. Not Walter. Felice. They were stretched out on canvas mats, face down, lips almost touching, and Felice had a blue bikini on. Wherever I looked I saw her bottom and it kept me looking up every minute to see if Lois was coming, so we could take a quick dip in the pool and then go up to one of our rooms and forget

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what we were doing with our lives. One of the soldiers from the machine-gun nest was staring at Felice, too. When he looked away and caught my eye he glared at me. As though he were jealous of us pampered proxies. Jealous of us! He was a new man. By the end of the week he wouldn't be jealous any more. If he lasted that long. He wasn't supposed to be looking our way. He was supposed to be guarding us against any evil-intentioned Earth patriots or guerrillas who might be trying to sneak in to interrupt our deliberations, and if the lieutenant caught him gazing at the girls he would have been in trouble of his own.

The funny thing was that the machine-gunner wasn't looking at Elsa, who was a lot closer and just about as naked. I guess a weeping woman was not the right kind of sex object. "Pay attention to your game," Alice scolded, but Elsa was not capable of that. You couldn't blame her. She had been on her honeymoon when she was recruited and they wouldn't let her new husband come with her. Elsa is short, slim, pretty, very, very young. Her hair is short, too, muddy brown streaked with gold, and it flops around her head when she moves. I would bet that represented a seventy-five dollar investment at the beauty parlor to get ready for the wedding, and now it was wasted on us. "Hell with it," said Alice, tipping the backgammon board so all the pieces slid to the end and turning to me. "Ben? Do you know what you were talking about today?"

"The same thing. Minerals. Radionuclides mostly—they're apeshit for the radioactive stuff."

She nodded as though it meant something to her. Perhaps it did, but not to me. In those wheeling and dealing sessions I understand only part of what is being said, even when it comes out of my own mouth. What do I know about curium or americium or carbon-14? This may be just as well. Sometimes I think the Earth patriots have the right idea, and if I really knew what the deals in the Liliuokalani Ballroom were about, I would be grabbing a gun and trying to storm the Makele Motel myself. If the boss let me, of course, which, of course, he wouldn't.

Elsa had stopped sobbing long enough to gaze mistily at the lobby door. "What's that?" she asked, the object of her question being five dilapidated people in clothes meant for Boston or Chicago, gaping apprehensively at the pool and the armed guards. The assistant manager of the motel was trying to soothe them, but not succeeding.

"Congratulations, Elsa," I said, "you're now a senior member. That's what we all looked like when we got here. There's a new generation of recruits."

It would have been an act of kindness to go up to them and welcome them and try to make them feel less trapped and hopeless. But why should I lie to them? Anyway my lunch was arriving. Anyway there were two members of our happy family walking toward them already, except that their errand was not welcoming. They were occupied. They were walking along together, clutching each other's hands and shouting in

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

each other's ears. Alice scowled because they were making so much noise, and the waiter, coming toward me with my dinner, switched and took the long way around to avoid them. Their names were Greg and Julio. I said they were "walking", but actually Greg was bouncy-hopping like Peter Cottontail and Julio was slinking like a two-legged cat. Or like Groucho Marx. They were heading directly for one of those palm trees that looks like a green fright wig growing out of the top of an artichoke and, as they were not looking where they were going, Julio plowed right into it. Head on. Still talking; and he kept right on talking while Greg jerked him back on his feet and they walked on, although Julio was beginning to bleed fairly heavily around the cheekbone. The new arrivals scattered despairingly, and then disappeared back in the lobby.

But I had my lunch to attend to. The orange juice was fresh and fine. The roast beef was good, too, although as the pool waiter was serving it Alice suddenly jumped up, kicked over the backgammon board and left for one of the motel meeting rooms at a dead run, arms and legs windmilling wildly. The waiter dodged out of the way, his face blanching. Elsa gaped after her and then lifted her face and howled, big tears sliding down her face. Then Elsa stood and ran in the opposite direction, back to her room. But there was nothing queer about her gait. It was Elsa doing it herself, just scared sick and despairing. And there I was, all alone by the million-dollar pool, eating my fifty-dollar meal outside my two-hundred-dollar-a-day hotel room and wondering if, after all, there was really anything wrong with suicide.

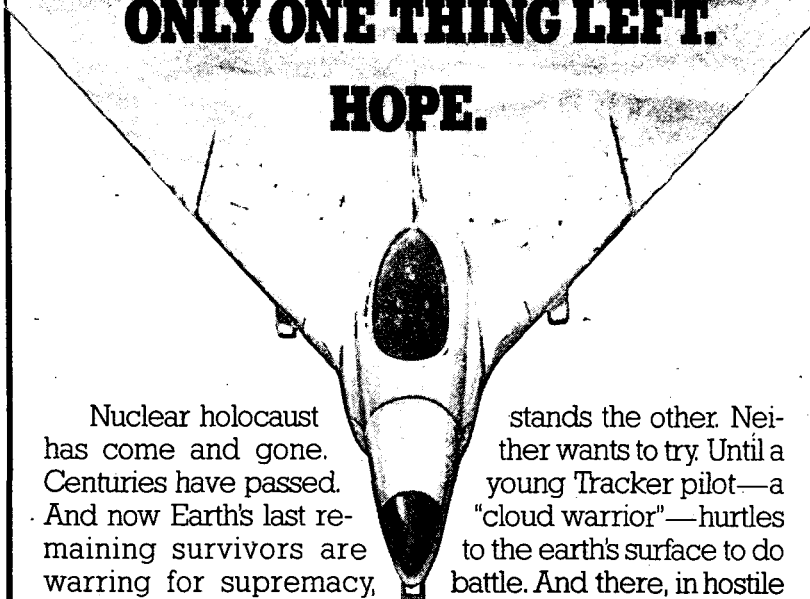
It was a thought that had crossed my mind before. It had occurred to me, in fact, about every other minute since that minute when I turned off the eleven o'clock news, got into my pajamas, brushed my teeth in front of the bathroom mirror . . . and then, in an instant, saw that something else was looking out of my sleepy eyes. It was something I neither recognized nor knew what to do about, but I didn't have any choice. What I did for the next little while was not my own doing. I dialed an 800 number I hadn't known I knew. I put a coat on over the pajamas and waited about five minutes, not more, until a Long Beach ambulance pulled up at my door and a jittery driver took me to a helicopter pad, then to LAX, then by jet to Hawaii, then here. I left a whole life back in Orange County. Three girls I was dating. Folk-dancing every Thursday night. Car payments, mortgage, an unfinished manual on a new pocket calculator and the Sunday crossword puzzle left undone. I didn't even get a chance to say good-bye. So my thoughts are often gloomy, but the brightener is Lois. I was fiddling with the last of the roast beef when I heard her call my name.

I jumped up, and she ran into my arms. Lois is not anything like any of the three women back in Orange County. I don't think I would have dated her there, not so much because she is black as because she is skinny, at least ten years older than me, and not really all that pretty. But here on beautiful Maui she had one big thing going for her. That

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AFTER THE BOMB, THERE IS ONLY ONE THING LEFT.

HOPE.



Nuclear holocaust has come and gone. Centuries have passed. And now Earth's last remaining survivors are warring for supremacy, and heading for extinction.

Aboveground live the Mutes—a tribal nation possessed with supernatural powers. In the bowels of the earth lie their mortal enemy, the Trackers, a high-tech society.

Neither group understands the other. Neither wants to try. Until a young Tracker pilot—a "cloud warrior"—hurtles to the earth's surface to do battle. And there, in hostile territory, he befriends two Mutes, a man and a woman. Enemies once, they now become comrades embarked on a desperate mission. Three people who could well be Earth's last great hope for peace... and survival.

CLOUD WARRIOR

A NOVEL OF THE FUTURE

By Patrick Tilley

304 pages / $14.95

MACMILLAN

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was that when we made love, *after* we made love, she was the one to whom I could hold tight while we admitted to each other how bad we really felt. "Are you hungry?" I asked her. She gave me the answer just by the way she looked up at me, grinning, and I said, "Your place or mine?" I didn't have to ask that. I knew the answer. The answer was "the nearest." With my free hand I grabbed a couple of rolls for Lois in case she really was hungry, and we started off, arms around each other's waists.

And then the boss whispered, "Now."

That was that. I dropped the rolls. I stepped on them as I turned. I felt my knuckles bounce off Lois's elbow when she didn't get out of the way fast enough but I didn't look at her. I was looking where I was heading, in that fast and spastic marionette hustle, all the way to the Liliuokalani Ballroom.

There is a book about a little boy named Curdie. I read it as a little kid. Curdie spent his time in the deep mines in, I guess, Germany or somewhere, being chased by weird-looking kobalds and gnomes and creepy, awful creatures of all kinds. The book scared me into five-year-old nightmares. I did not, at that time, think I would ever be one of the gnomes.

But that is what we all were. Crawly and spastic. Berserk or just bizarre. We moved the way our bosses moved. We writhed and wriggled, and we hissed at each other or screamed. I looked at my colleagues in the ballroom or the meeting rooms, when we were settling shipment priorities or whatever it was we were doing. They were awful. So was I. I cannot tell you how grossly violated this makes you feel, when some far-off boss takes over the body your mother lovingly hatched for you and the mind you've filled with a million memories and the mouth you have used to speak your heart. It isn't your heart that's speaking now. It is someone else's, or something else's, and most likely it is something that doesn't even have a heart back where it comes from, but turns out to be a cluster of heavy-metal polyps on the slushy bottom of an ammonia sea, or a halogen jelly in some poison swamp. The other night, while Lois was having her once-a-day hysterics, she whimpered that it was like being raped by the Fifth Armored Division, tanks and all. It isn't though. It's worse.

I suppose that in its time the Liliuokalani Ballroom has had its share of weddings and corporate planning sessions and bar-mitzvahs, or whatever they have on Maui that's like a bar-mitzvah, and I bet every one of them was more fun than the bargaining sessions. You'd see the hotel people sneaking around, trying not to attract attention while they dusted off the tables and picked up the trash—and the worse than trash—because the sessions went on non-stop. All day, every day. It was about three in the afternoon when I bounced back into the bargaining session, but it would have been the same at midnight. I plunged right into the bar-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gaining. That's how the boss does it. There aren't any introductions, just all of a sudden you're battling over which planet gets the next shipment of high-level military wastes, or who is willing to give up a load of spent fuel from a nuclear generating station if he can have the right to trawl the Atlantic sea-bottom for old ocean-dumped canisters.

As if any of it was theirs to begin with!

They say taking away all these dangerous radioactive wastes is actually a kindness to us on their part, because we've been worrying so much about how to deal with them. Their plan is simple. They ship them all to Borneo. Why Borneo? Because Borneo is on the Equator, and that's where they're building their launch catapult, which will throw the cargoes into low-Earth orbit, whereupon they will be packed into photon-sail ships, and sooner or later they will get to where one of the spacies wants them. When they talk to the human race in one of their occasional public statements they're always pointing out that this is, really, awfully sweet of them. We don't have much they want, they say. The launch system they're building is very expensive (though the Earth governments are paying for it!). The only reason they're doing it in the first place, they tell us, is that they just want to give us a hand, to speed up our intellectual and technological advancement so we can be as good as they are.

Maybe so. They're not in any hurry about it, though. Some of those cargoes aren't going to get there for a thousand years, because photon-sail ships aren't very fast. They don't care. They have plenty of time. And they tell us that by the time the cargoes start arriving, we pitiful human beings will be educated up to their standard, and then we can join the galactic club. Oh, frabjous day! Oh, time of great joy for the world! Then the trade will be two-way. Then they'll send us just shiploads and shiploads of the most marvelous and technologically advanced gadgets. . . . I imagine that's what Captain Bligh told the Tahitians when he swiped their breadfruit.

On the other hand (so my friend Marc says), you have to admit the spacies did us a kind of a favor, at that. The old Earth was really scaring itself to death; fifty thousand nuclear warheads pointed at fifty thousand others and all of them on a short fuse. There was a three-way summit conference going on in Geneva when the first spacies began grabbing off human beings to be their slaves. It wasn't going well, either, and I think every one of us breathed a sigh of relief when the Americans and Russians and Chinese issued a joint communique (the first they'd ever agreed on!) to say that in view of the extraordinary circumstances (meaning the spacies) they were going to recess the meetings "without prejudice" (meaning they would take their fingers off the triggers, at least for a minute).

So I guess in a way we poor puppets are a big help to the human race. Our own governments tell us we are. They say we are VIPs squared, although you don't feel Very Important when you're in one of those meetings and see yourself trying to emphasize a point by shaking or

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

waving and uncoiling a member you don't have, although you'd be surprised how close you can come. But they say we do big work. They say that because the travel times are so long there's no way at all for these starborn creatures to come in person to our miserable little out-of-the-way planet. So if we want poor primitive Earth to play any part at all in the great galactic congeries of cultures they have to do it the only way they can. Telepathically. Not exactly telepathically, but by thought, beefed up by some sort of amplifying technology that lets them reach out millions of times faster than light, into the minds of such handy appliances as Lois and Elsa and me, so that we can be their eyes and arms and voices. The word is "possessed." There really are demons, only they come from places like Fomalhaut and Alpha Centauri. And they don't want our souls. All they want is our radionuclides . . . and the frail and frantic bodies of people like me to puppet so they can squawk and scream at each other as they confer to divide up the loot.

So they say we matter, we miserable puppets on Hawaii's golden island. They say we're so terribly important that all the resources of the civilized world are at our disposal to protect us. (We've never asked for them, though.) They surround us with machine-guns and patrol the air overhead with F-15s and Foxbats, so that no wild-eyed Earth patriot can break in to interrupt our galactic deliberations. Big deal! Oh, biggest of all deals ever! I do not deserve such an honor. I've got my faults. But that wicked I have never been.

And that's the way it was with us. . . .

Until suddenly, one morning, it wasn't.

I'd had a really good night's sleep, the first in ages. I woke ravenous and rested. Fruit and rolls and orange juice in a bowl of ice and hot coffee in a thermos were set out on the lanai, the way they were every morning, and I stretched and yawned and gloried to myself in the fact that I'd been left alone for, what was it?, had to be ten hours or more! Hot sun beat down on me as I swallowed the juice and poured the coffee. There was an unusual number of us poor captives down in the gardens. I saw Alice, standing by the carp pool, just as she caught sight of me up on the lanai. "Come down!" she called. "Hurry up, come on, Ben! Now!"

I was feeling too good to be playing cards. "I'm not interested in playing bridge right now," I called back, surveying the people on the chance that Lois, too, had time off, and Alice cackled:

"Bridge! Who said anything about bridge? Wake up and smell the coffee cooking, you idiot. Don't you know they've *gone*?"

Well, they weren't really "gone," of course, because in any tangible physical sense they'd never been there. But what Alice meant was unbelievably true. The insides of all our heads were vacated by the squatters. Our bodies had been returned to us. The endless squawking, bickering conferences to split up the spoils of Earth were permanently

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

adjourned—not just in Hawaii, not just for the moment, but all over the Earth and lastingly. Left us stranded and confused. Oh, glad about it, sure. But none of us had expected so instant a reprieve, neither us unlucky subjects nor our masters who owned the machine-guns. Ninety minutes after the last straggle of alien-run humans abandoned their cawing and screeching at each other in the Liliuokalani Room the five-power commandants were there, arguing about what to do with us. Let us go home? Oh, hell, no! Not a chance! The spacies might come back. No, sir, we guests would have to just go on being guests until, uh,—until—until somebody could figure out just what was going on. Whenever that might be. If the five military commandants were confused it was because their governments were even more confused than they were. There had been no warning at all. The spacies just *left*. The possessed engineers at the launch facility in Borneo were as abandoned as we; we were the "representatives" in the capitals of the major powers. So was the whole Earth. They didn't even say good-by.

On the other hand, being confined to the paradise islands of the Pacific wasn't really all that bad, once we began to believe we were going to be allowed to finish a kiss we started, or be there to eat an ordered meal. You could say it was pretty neat, in fact. We swam in the surf or the pool. We rode the bridle paths up the slopes of Haleakala. We learned snorkeling and wind-surfing, and they even opened the bars again.

In the case of Lois and me, what we did a lot of was try to figure out What to Do about Us. See, we'd never met until we were both drafted, without consent or option. And while we had come to treasure each other very much there was a real question about how well we'd fit into each other's lives on a long-term basis. By the end of the first day I had agreed that the age thing didn't matter. On the second Lois conceded that neither, really, did color. Where we were hung up mostly was on the fact that she didn't want to live in Orange County and I didn't think I could get a job back in her home town, which was Philadelphia. After we batted it back and forth for a while without progress, we finally went to arbitration.

The only arbitration available was our mutual friend Marc Socul. We found him in the Whaler Bar, drinking Mai Tais and smoking two-dollar cigars, with a fresh white orchid lei around his neck. There was a noisy end of the bar (where Elsa's friends were having a welcoming party for her bridegroom, just allowed to fly in) and a quiet end, where the TV set was on with the picture bright but the sound down, showing some satellite remote from some place like Geneva, and no one watching it. Marc was at the quiet end. He had taken a whole table to spread out yellow ruled pads and neatly sharpened pencils. We caught him in the throes of literary composition. When he looked up, sucking on the end of a pencil, he scowled at us for a moment before he noticed who we were. "Ah, my children," he said genially, "got everything straightened out? No? What's the matter?" And when we told him what was the matter, he scoffed,

LICENSED TO ICG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Job? What are you worrying about a job for, Ben? You're fixed for life, after you write your book!"

That was a new one on me. "What book?"

"Your personal-experience book. *I Was a Prisoner of the Star Creatures*—only you can't use that title, because it's mine."

"That's really *dumb*, Marc," said Lois. "There's dozens of us could write that same book—how many do you think people are going to read?"

"Right!" he cried, lifting his Mai Tai to her. "Exactly! That's why you want to get in first. Last night I sneaked over to the airport and cabled six New York literary agents. The first one that promises me a half-million advance gets my business. The second one you can have. Now," he said, putting down his drink and picking up his cigar, "we've got to have some ground rules. Your personal story's your own, that's for sure—you do a sort of autobiography leading up to the day you were taken. Then you describe how it felt to be possessed like we were, what your particular boss was like—"

"I don't know if I want to think about that," said Lois, licking her lips.

"Up to you," shrugged Marc. "It's good catharsis, but if you don't want to—Anyway, then we come to the interpretive part."

"What interpretive part?" I asked.

"When you explain what you think the spacies were really doing," he said, and waved me quiet when I started to object. "I know we don't really *know* any of that, but then nobody else in the world does, either, so who are they going to want to hear guesses from if not from us? That's where we have to be careful. I'll tell you my theory, but you can't use it; you have to make up your own. My idea is that the spacies didn't really know much about the Earth till they started taking people over. Then they were disappointed. What they really want is radioactive materials, and we just didn't have enough to justify all their effort—pay attention, Lois!" he ordered crossly. "It's important we don't use the same stuff!"

But she wasn't listening. She was looking past him and over his head, at the silent TV screen. When I saw what she was gaping at I stared too. It was the Geneva meeting, and the face of an announcer in the foreground was whispering into a microphone while limousines behind her were pulling up and disgorging their occupants.

I don't remember jumping up. All of a sudden there I was, with the audio gain knob in my hand, and the announcer's voice was telling us in hushed tones that this was the resumed summit session. "I guess you were right, Marc," I said, staring at the screen. "I guess we just didn't have enough radioactive wastes to satisfy them." He turned irritably, and then squawked as he saw what we were seeing: the Russian delegate hopping out of his car in a terribly familiar bunny-jump way, the Chinese slithering, the American walking as though on stilts, getting ready to enter the conference that would decide whether to put off Armaggedon for a while yet . . . or produce enough radioactive wastes to satisfy any demand at all. ●

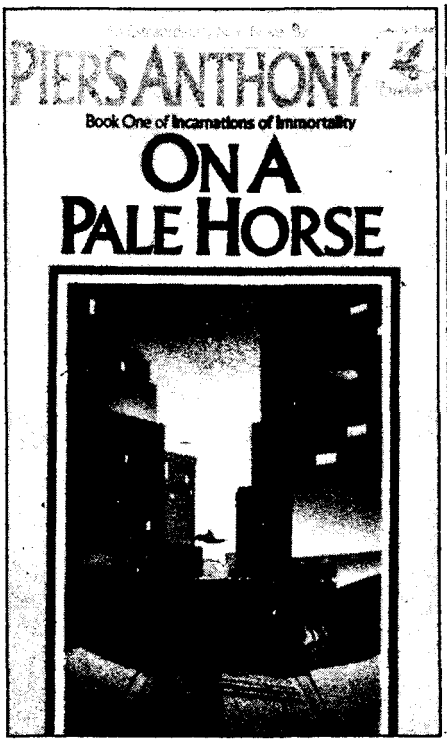
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Finally in paperback—the first in the new fantasy series by the creator of *Xanth*!

ON A PALE HORSE

Book One of
Incarnations of Immortality
PIERS ANTHONY

When Zane, a mere mortal, attempts suicide, Death interrupts him. When Zane kills Death, Fate appears and informs him that *he* is now Death; it is the law of the land. The new occupant of the office reluctantly learns to perform his duties. But when Death falls in love, he learns the game has been rigged—and by none other than Satan himself...



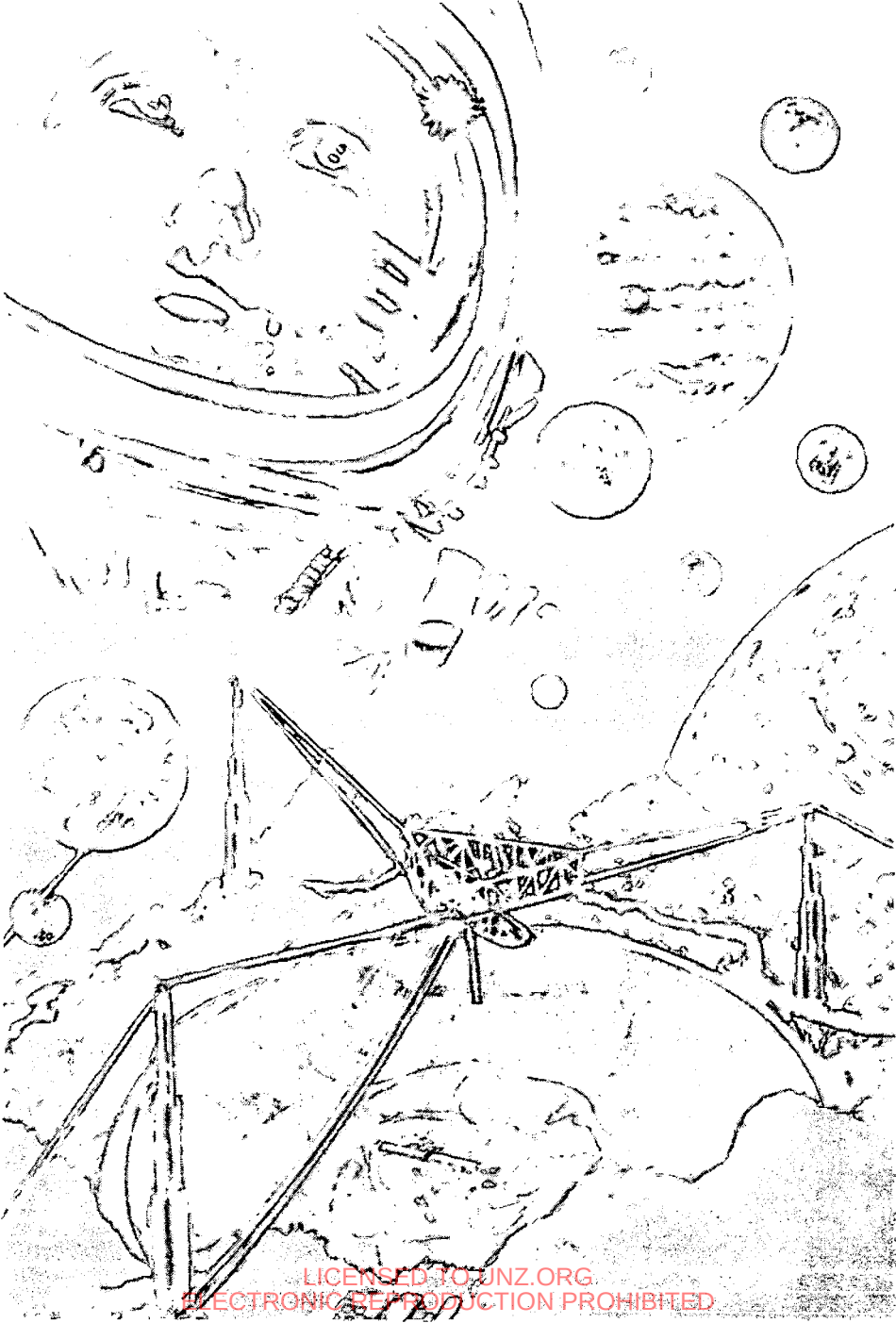
Cover illustration by Michael Whelan

On Sale in August
$2.95

#1 in Science Fiction and Fantasy
Published by Ballantine Books

DEL REY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VIEWPOINT

THE FERMI PARADOX

art: Hank Jankus

by Stephen L. Gillett, Ph.D.

If "they" are out there, why haven't they stopped by? This month's Viewpoint addresses the evidence supporting a "humans only" universe. Next month Dr. Robert A. Freitas Jr. will present the other side in his Viewpoint "Fermi's Paradox: A Real Howler."

After a stint with a small consulting firm in the Seattle area, Dr. Gillett is now an independent geological consultant. His research on the interface between geology, geophysics, and geochemistry has resulted in numerous scientific publications. The following article, though, arose from his long-time interest in science fiction.

LICENSED TO GALILEO
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VIEWPOINT

We *may* be alone.

All right, we *are* alone. I think.

Oh, I know all the standard arguments. The Sun is a humdrum dwarf star in a low-rent district in the Milky Way galaxy; there are perhaps 100 billion stars in our galaxy; and there are perhaps a hundred billion galaxies in our Universe. Why should we think there's anything particularly special about our Earth? There should be millions of Earth-like planets in our galaxy alone. Shouldn't there be?

Well, that's been pretty much the party line, both in SF and in SETI (the Search for ExtraTerrestrial Intelligence). The Plurality of Worlds has been a given, based on arguments like those above. (And, less consciously, on the ubiquity of life on our own planet.)

But let's take the Plurality of Worlds to its logical conclusion. Because of exponential growth, life is either absent or abundant; intermediate states are rare. Thomas Jefferson thought it would take a thousand years to settle the American West; it took less than a hundred. The progeny of a handful of rabbits overran Australia within a few decades. And we've all heard of the successively dividing bacteria that, if unchecked, would equal the mass of the Earth within a few years.

Exponential growth is also intimately intertwined with James Lovelock's Gaia metaphor; life transforms its environment, and in some sense becomes identified with it. Photosynthetic microbes learn to release oxygen—and now the Earth has a corrosive, oxygen-rich atmosphere unlike any other in the Solar System. Plants colonize the land, and rework it beyond recognition. (It's a major problem to visualize what landscapes looked like in the Precambrian and early Paleozoic, before plants exploded onto the surface. Our experience is too colored by the present.) Further, living things maintain—apparently indefinitely—an environment far out of chemical equilibrium. Methane, for example, is detectable in our oxygen-rich atmosphere, despite the fact that it reacts with oxygen and is constantly being destroyed. The source of the methane is bacterial action in swamps and wetlands, and probably also the intestinal gases in herbivores. Indeed, Lovelock predicted that Mars was dead—to the annoyance of the Viking researchers—because its atmosphere seems so readily explained by simple inorganic

Copyright (©) 1984 by Stephen L. Gillett

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

processes.

In this perspective, there's a continuum from coral reefs to cities; from bovine flatulence to Hoover Dam. Life remakes its surroundings. But why stop there? Why don't we see a spectrum to Dyson spheres? Ringworlds? Where is the spoor of the Type II and Type III civilizations?

Why isn't the Universe acrawl with aliens?

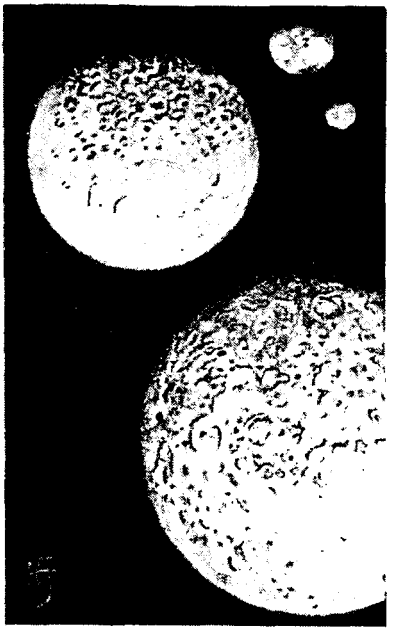
Because of considerations like these, Enrico Fermi (no less!) is said to have asked "Where are They?"—and the absence of hard evidence for extraterrestrial intelligence is now called the Fermi Paradox.

Consider Earth. If we don't blow ourselves up, we will break out into the Solar System within the next 100 years—and I expect that we will further break out of the Solar System and into interstellar space within the next thousand years. Technical civilization took perhaps five thousand years to evolve. *Homo*(self-named)*sapiens*, a few million. Sounds like a long time, right? To human beings, a few million years is well-nigh indistinguishable from eternity. But the Earth is 4.6 *billion* years old, and has another 4 or 5 billion years to go before the Sun evolves into a red giant. Evolving humans out of the rest of life took less than 0.1 percent of the age of the Earth; and developing technical civilization took a miniscule 0.0001 percent. An eyeblink! In another eyeblink, we'll be out to the nearest stars. And in less time than it took humans to evolve from australopithecines, we can be across the Galaxy.

To put things in perspective, let's take a numerical example. Start with something the size of Niven's Known Space, which seems to be a sphere about 400 light years in diameter that contains perhaps 45 million stars. Suppose a given star colonizes 10 other stars in 100 years, and then stops. Those stars in turn will colonize ten more apiece, and so on. Note that colonization need not proceed with classical starships; an O'Neill type space colony with fusion thrusters, moving at say seven percent of lightspeed, should work just fine. Such a colony goes to a new sun and builds more colonies out of asteroidal material; they certainly won't need an Earthlike planet, and they may not even be interested in the planets at all, at least at first. (Having the colonization stop after 10 colonies crudely accounts for the fact that the new colonies need some time to get established, and that it will

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VIEWPOINT



"... There's a continuum from coral reefs to cities; from bovine flatulence to Hoover Dam. Life remakes its surroundings. But why stop there? Why don't we see a spectrum to Dyson spheres? Ringworlds? ... Why isn't the Universe acrawl with aliens?"

probably be impractical to ride an O'Neill colony for more than five or six lightyears—voyages 70 to 85 years long.)

This model predicts that all those 45,000,000 stars are colonized within 8000 years—about the time that's elapsed since the Pyramids were built. Further, the entire Galaxy, with perhaps 100 billion stars, can be entirely colonized in 11 million years, less time than has elapsed since the emergence of the proto-homonid *Proconsul* in Miocene Africa. Although this model is pretty crude (I just dashed these calculations off on my trusty TI-59), these results show the effects of exponential growth. Those of you who like Martin Gardner's column may wish to devise some more detailed models.

There's more. Even if technical civilization collapses, there are still about 4,999,995,000 years left for someone else to pick up the pieces.

But, but, but . . . not so fast, Gillett. What about resource depletion? If our civilization collapses, there won't be the wherewithal to pick up the pieces. And what about nuclear war—a major cataclysm could damage the biosphere for a long, long time. Nuclear waste can last for millions of years, after all. . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Well, things are not necessarily that bleak. But OK—for the sake of argument, say civilization doesn't arise again for 70 million years. That's about the time that's elapsed since the dinosaurs died out (killed by the climatic disruptions from a meteorite impact or whatever). That still leaves about 4,930,000,000 years before the Sun dies. Furthermore, 70 million years is plenty of time to put the Earth's resource base back together; f'instance, most of the oil we use today is 70 million years old or less. (Oil, surprisingly enough, is an *ephemeral* deposit, geologically; old oil eventually becomes exposed by erosion and runs away, or is evaporated to a gummy, virtually useless mess like the Tar Sands in Alberta.) And even if *that* civilization self-destructs, and no one else arises for *another* 70 million years, there's still 4,860,000,000 years left. . . . You see? There's a *lot* of time available.

And the *Earth's* present age is less than half the Universe's.

So where'n hell *are* they?

Well, maybe they're really there.

Perhaps moral or esthetic considerations restrain advanced civilizations from making perceptible impact on the Universe. Or maybe such civilizations fall into decadence, or become interested in affairs beyond our imagining.

But I don't believe it. Really, now . . . *everybody, everywhere* for 10 billion years? The sheer number of stars, and the immensity of geologic time, make such constraints—as *general* rules—seem unlikely. Once you have complex life at all, remember how little time it takes, proportionately, to evolve a civilization. Or to re-evolve one, if the first should destroy itself. Even if most superadvanced civilizations are restrained by ethical, esthetic, or philosophic concerns, all it takes is *one* that isn't.

Or perhaps superintelligences are all around us, and the Earth is deliberately being left to itself. Maybe we're a laboratory study or a wilderness area. Some years back, Fritz Leiber wrote an excellent and chilling novel *(The Wanderer)* on just this idea. But, like contrails over the Primitive Area, it seems that we oughtta see *something*. Believers in UFOs as extraterrestrial visitors will no doubt cite them as just such examples, but the evidence I have seen for such "visitations" is miragelike; the closer you get, the less substantial it becomes.

Stronger evidence of our aloneness is not that we haven't had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

visitors, but that so far the Universe seems remarkably well explained by natural causes. It's hard to escape the conclusion that if intelligence is common, there are some vast projects going on somewhere: Dyson spheres, Ringworlds, or whatever. But the Galaxy seems more than natural; it seems *inorganic*. As Lovelock pointed out about Mars, the place just seems too explainable.

You can object that we might not recognize evidence of extraterrestrial intelligence if we saw it, because scientists would assume the phenomenon *not* to be the result of intelligence. Well, true, but only to begin with. Intelligent activity as a scientific explanation is classically excluded by Ockham's Razor, the principle that the simplest hypothesis is best. If something shows up that *can't* be explained by anything but intelligence, it will become glaringly obvious before very long. In fact, it will be the more convincing for having thus become obvious.

Maybe they really exist. But I just don't think so . . . it seems we'd *know* already. (We *should* carry out SETI, however; reams of philosophical conjectures are no substitute for experiment, in any sort of scientific endeavor.)

But for now let's speculate. What hurdles might there be along the evolutionary path to intelligence? Maybe we're like the lungfish crawling out onto dry land, looking around for other lungfish . . . and there aren't any.

Maybe the Earth is unique; or, at least, maybe Earthlike planets are extremely rare. If the Earth were just a bit warmer, just a bit closer to the Sun, enough additional water vapor would be evaporated from the oceans to significantly increase the Earth's greenhouse effect. This increase would raise the temperatures yet further, so that more water would evaporate, resulting in yet a further increase in surface temperature. . . . This process results in what's called the "runaway greenhouse": The oceans would boil, and Earth would become a duplicate of Venus.

If the Earth, on the other hand, had formed a bit farther from the Sun, it would have frozen. The polar icecaps, because they're white, significantly increase the reflectivity, or "albedo," of the Earth, and thus make solar heating of the Earth less efficient. If the Earth were cooled enough, the icecaps would grow enough to set up another vicious cycle—a runaway glaciation instead of a runaway greenhouse.

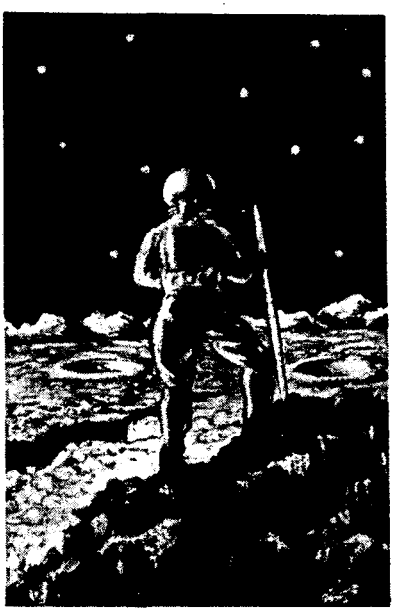
Additionally, current astrophysical theories suggest

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that the Sun has gotten about 30 percent brighter over the lifetime of the Earth. It's not enough that the solar influx be OK now, it must have remained in bounds for the last 4.5 billion years. In fact, recent work on modeling climate over geologic time suggests that the Earth has just barely avoided the runaway ice age on the one hand, and the runaway greenhouse on the other. As Tom Heppenheimer has said, Earth's history resembles the Perils of Pauline.

Maybe Earth's gigantic Moon has somehow aided the evolution—and maintenance!—of life. Moons as big as ours are liable to be rare; the theoreticians have great difficulty in accounting for the Moon's existence. The Moon could have stabilized climate, because the Earth-Moon system as a whole is less vulnerable to orbital fluctuations (such as those on Mars) than the Earth alone would be. Or maybe (as Isaac Asimov has suggested more than once) the lunar tide spurred the evolution of land life. (I don't believe this, but—maybe so.)

Maybe the Earth's been blessed with a particularly stable galactic environment. The core hasn't exploded and sterilized the entire galaxy with ionizing radiation, or the Sun hasn't been perturbed



"Stronger evidence of our alone-ness is not that we haven't had visitors, but that so far the Universe seems remarkably well explained by natural causes. As Lovelock pointed out about Mars, the place just seems too explainable."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into an orbit that carries it into the galactic center.

(Adherents of the Gaia hypothesis claim that these Perils of Pauline scenarios are too grim, because life has taken a hand in maintaining its own environment by means of feedback mechanisms. But that can't always have been true. Evolution must have floundered around a good deal in developing the feedback mechanisms. The environment must have been pretty stable to allow such experimentation to begin with.)

Even if life isn't unique to Earth, it may nonetheless be rare, and complex life that leads to intelligence may be a fluke. For example, the amount of water on the Earth's surface is probably a cosmic accident, and there could have easily been more; maybe Earthlike worlds that are all sea are the rule. As has been pointed out many times before, marine life is not a good bet for developing spacefaring intelligence. (During periods of active seafloor spreading, the Earth itself comes very close to being Sea; the seafloor swells and the continents are largely flooded. Such "marine transgressions" are common in the geologic record.)

Or maybe the step to metazoans—multicelled life—is a hard one. It took almost four billion years on the Earth. Perhaps it generally doesn't happen at all.

Or maybe it's hard to develop technology even if intelligence should arise. Our oxygen atmosphere is about ideal for developing a complex, metal-based technology. Oxygen is highly reactive; you can stoke a fire and achieve highly concentrated energy release. Due to its double bond, however, oxygen is not so reactive that it can't be controlled at all. (Although iron rusts, at least it doesn't spontaneously ignite.)

If, instead, some critter had learned how to release chlorine from the chloride in seawater, and chlorine as well as oxygen existed in the atmosphere . . . well, an atmosphere like that is probably too corrosive for metal to be practical. (Look at a commercial chlorination facility sometime, say at a public swimming pool! I worked at such a place once upon a time.) Hence, intelligent beings won't have an incentive to smelt metals, and then no electrical conductors are available when someone starts experimenting. . . .

Or another example: water oceans and life might occur without free oxygen. The environment might be too rich in sulfur (or carbon, or nitrogen,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or . . .) to allow free oxygen to accumulate. Again, life, even intelligent life, could exist, but spacefaring intelligence?

It would also be hard to develop a metal-based technology on those traditional ammonia-as-substitute-for-water worlds, if any such exist in the first place. Ammonium ion will be pervasive in a liquid ammonia sea. And ammonium dissolved in liquid ammonia acts as an acid, attacking such metals as iron. Of course, you also can't build a fire; the nitrogen, ammonia, or hydrogen in the atmosphere don't react enthusiastically enough to support combustion.

And that leads me into the nitty-gritty: most SF has been downright timid in dealing with the Fermi Paradox. There's a few exceptions: The Good Doctor, in the Foundation series, wrote of an "alien-less" Galaxy, but he seemed to presuppose the existence of numerous Earthlike planets without intelligence —which seems unlikely, unless the planets had been terraformed first. I've already mentioned Fritz Leiber's *The Wanderer*. Arthur C. Clarke resolved the matter in an entirely different way in *Childhood's End*. And a few other authors over the years have also grappled with the Paradox.

But traditionally, SF assumes a universe full of aliens—aliens commonly more advanced than we—without considering the consequences. *Star Trek*, of course, is notorious in this respect; the *Enterprise* skips from star to star finding new, often advanced civilizations—who somehow, inexplicably, have never left their home solar system although they can immobilize the starship. Aliens still show up regularly in this magazine, which is supposed to be a cut above media SF.

Even such hard SF authors as Poul Anderson and Larry Niven like to emphasize the vastness of the Universe to explain why we haven't been visited, without considering also its great age and the implications of exponential growth. And why can't superadvanced civilizations build more than Ringworlds?

Face it! What if we really *are* alone? Nature is often wasteful on a lavish scale; maybe in truth a hundred billion dead worlds form for every living one. What will this do to religion, to philosophy? (Consider, for a moment, the effect on origin-of-life theories!)

Or consider harrowing scenes where life started but was wiped out while still primitive; cooked by a runaway greenhouse, frozen by a runaway glaciation,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sterilized by a galactic explosion, or whatever. What will *that* do to notions of God? (And you thought the Flood was bad.)

As we go from star to star, finding nothing but dead worlds . . . maybe terraforming will become important. Johnny Appleseed on a cosmic scale. Many worlds that couldn't develop a biosphere *ex nihilo,* because they didn't have time to evolve all the necessary feedback mechanisms, can probably support a full biosphere—a Gaia—emplaced all at once. (Created in six days? Perhaps humans will be the agents of directed panspermia!)

On a more cerebral level, the Fermi Paradox leads to a curious conflict in the philosophy of science. Science has progressed since the time of Copernicus by assuming that humanity's place in the Universe is not particularly privileged. The Earth is one of several planets that circle the Sun; the Sun is an unspectacular star amongst billions, and so on. And in turn the doctrine (dogma?) of the plurality of worlds is philosophically rooted in this reaction to geo- and anthropocentrism. And yet, science has also progressed by assuming natural phenomena to be the result of natural processes rather than arbitrary, powerful intelligences. Now, The Plurality of Worlds and The Universe of Natural Causes seem to be on a collision course.

OK, you budding SF authors. Enough of cutesy aliens at every port of call. Get out there and tell it like it is! ●

MARTIN GARDNER

(From page 21)

SOLUTION TO AROUND THE SOLAR SYSTEM

Note that the names on the gray cells spell with an odd number of letters, and those on the white cells spell with an even number. Mathematicians say that the two sets of squares, along with their names, are of opposite parity. One is even parity, the other is odd. Each time the dime moves to an adjacent cell it changes parity.

If you start the dime on any cell, and move to spell the letters of the name on that cell, the coin is sure to end on a white cell. Because the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dime has now acquired even parity, all white cells must be unoccupied, so it is safe to request that a penny be placed on gray Venus.

From now on, at each step, the dime moves an odd number of times. It makes no difference whether it is moved seven times (or any other odd number), or moved to spell S-E-V-E-N, or any other word with an odd number of letters. If the spectator's first or last name has an odd number of letters, you can use his or her name for spelling. Every time the dime is moved, its parity alters. This allows you to direct that a penny be placed on a vacant cell of a parity opposite that of the dime. After eight steps, the only unoccupied cell will be the moon, with the dime resting on Pluto.

If you want to repeat the trick with a different final result, you'll have to work out a different set of instructions. With suitable instructions you can, of course, cause the dime to end on any of the shaded squares. Be careful, though, to eliminate the cells in such an order that the moving "spaceship" always has access to all the remaining unoccupied cells.

Now for a simple but tricky little problem that involves another kind of tour around the same matrix.

Place a dime on Mars. You are to move it in a sequence of straight line segments, each of which may be of any length and in any direction, diagonal as well as orthogonal. The task is to move the dime through all the remaining eight cells, and to do this with the smallest number of moves. For example, Figure 2 shows how it can be done in five moves.

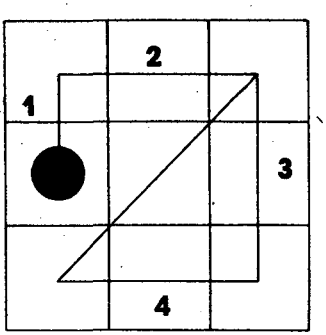
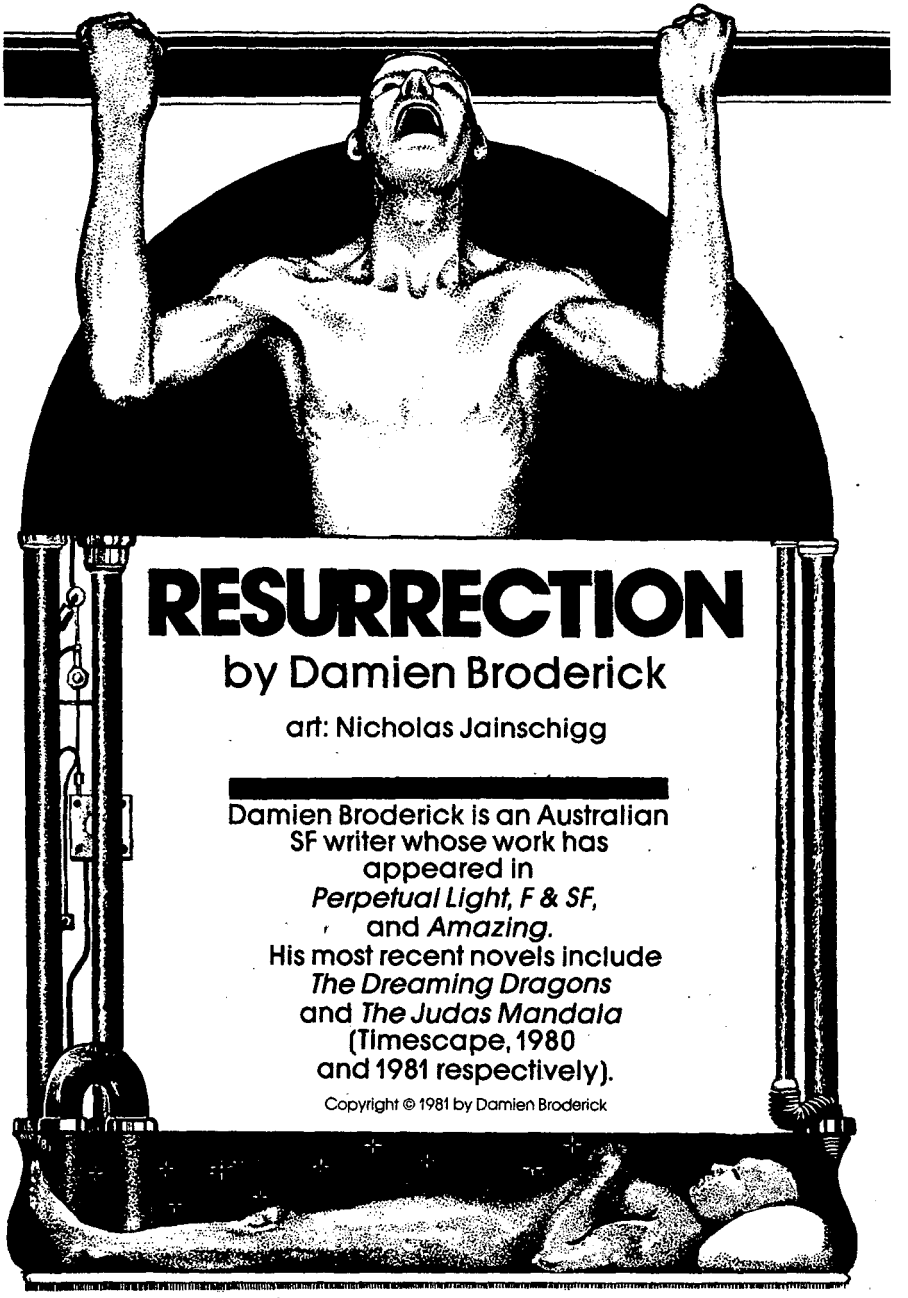


Figure 2

Incredible as it may seem, if you have the right "aha!" insight, you can do it in four. Most people find this task infuriatingly difficult, but don't spoil your pleasure in working on this clever combinatorial puzzle by looking at the answer on page 86 before you have done your best to solve it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



RESURRECTION

by Damien Broderick

art: Nicholas Jainschigg

Damien Broderick is an Australian SF writer whose work has appeared in *Perpetual Light, F & SF,* and *Amazing.* His most recent novels include *The Dreaming Dragons* and *The Judas Mandala* (Timescape, 1980 and 1981 respectively).

Copyright © 1981 by Damien Broderick

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They are the last of the guests to leave. Stepping from the warm friendliness of the apartment to the chilly foyer is a jolt, reinforcing Brian Hoffmann's melancholy. The weather has been bad for days, the news has been worse, the skinhead kids are skulking in pockets of shadows down there, waiting in their resentment to smash store windows, to snatch baubles and glass and mirrors like any bunch of unlettered savages . . .

"Sure you'll be okay?" askes Martha, kissing Alice on the cheek.

"Grab a coat, honey, and we'll see them to their car," suggests their tired host. It's obvious that all he wants to do is pile the wreckage into the dishwasher and hit the sack.

"Nonsense," Brian tells them forcefully. "We're only parked a block away."

Brian's mind, in truth, is parked more than a block away. His thoughts remain in Cambridge, in those buoyant sunny months when he and Turing and Campernowne and the rest of them had invented, in one fell swoop, the electronic computer, the theory of programming and the prospect of artificial machine intelligence. No, he is getting confused. Turing's machine was pre-electronic, fed with paper tape. My God. And Alan dead these 30 years. Some anniversary. He would have been nearly 72. Not old, not really. Not much older than me. But those hot-shots tonight, those kids from Silicon Valley.

"Still thinking about Alan?" asks Alice. He shivers at the sudden renewed awareness of cold night, sees that they've descended to the street.

"Mmm. Poor bugger. Still, it was nice of the kids to honor his memory."

"He was a great man," Alice says. She smiles primly. "You were all great men, Boson." That's their old academic joke. A boson is an elementary particle not governed by the Fermi Exclusion Principle which keeps protons and electrons in their proper places. A boson is welcome anywhere. You wouldn't kick a boson out of bed. If there had once been a touch of deep pain in that barb, it had been soothed by years of growing old.

The bunch of skins is suddenly there on the path. They have every right to be there. It's a free country, isn't it?

"Oh Christ, Brian."

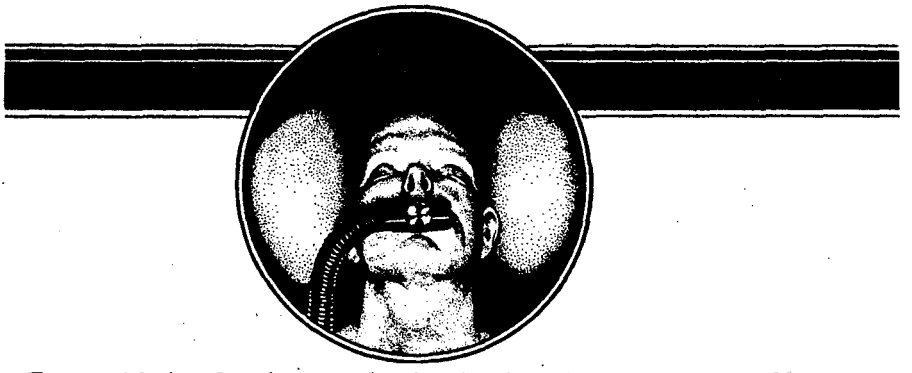
"Come on," he says with irritation. "They're just kids."

"Of course they're kids, Brian." Alice's voice sounds as if it's being strained through tight mesh. "You're not *allowed* to be a juvenile delinquent after you're grown up."

They are stringing themselves out across the path. Pimples. Stubble on the skull. Must they make themselves so ugly?

"Juvenile delinquent! Darling, that expression was put on the pension in 1956. You've turned into a nervous Nellie in your dotage."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Tense with dread on his arm, her hand jerks. Alice's voice rises: "Oh God, I don't like this."

A body moves into the space they are passing through, thumps into him cruelly.

"Watch it, you bastard," cries the affronted thug.

Mildly, Brian recovers his balance. "Sorry."

"You walked straight into me. Did you see that, Bill? He walked right into me. Think they own the whole road, these rich shits."

From the other side, keeping step with them, a peaky girl asks: "Got any change?"

Too quickly, Alice tells her, "We never carry money."

"You greedy old bitch," the thug says in outrage, "I'll fix you."

And the horror of it is that Brian *understands,* haven't they been talking about it all night? It's his doing as much as anyone's; in all the world, he's crucially responsible for the machines which have taken their jobs away, taken their souls from them. It paralyzes him. He feels the battering on his body, but only as a kind of moral retribution. It hurts, blood tastes in his mouth, he cannot see any longer from his right eye, his heart clenches in dread for Alice, but he knows that at last some payment is being rightly exacted.

Alice is shouting, "Leave him alone, you vicious little . . ."

"Get out of the way, you cow," says one of the girls. "Get his wallet, Don."

They pull roughly at his person. That burst of masochism is passing with the shock of passivity, he is starting to seethe with rage, with fear for Alice, my God, in the middle of the street in a civilized city—

"Twenty bucks! You rotten miserable bastards."

So the punishment is going to be renewed. Brian pulls down his head, in against his chest, whimpering.

"Stick the knife in, Don," the girl says. Her breath is rather sweet. Metal loops swing from her pink ear. Her hair, out of focus, in again, stands like mown hay, pink and gold in the streetlamp light. The other face comes down, and a lash of light from another kind of metal. It enters his body again and again.

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The young ambulance attendant looks up into the shadowed face of his colleague. A few unshaved whiskers glint on the older man's cheek. "We can give the siren a rest, Bob. This one's dead."

Bob frowns, jerks his head briefly in the direction of the gray-haired woman speaking quietly with a constable. "That's the wife. Wouldn't have a sedative. Keep it down, sport." A spear of brightness at the dead man's wattled throat. "What's that?"

"Doesn't matter much now, does it? Epileptic, diabetic, something . . ."

Bob pushes him aside, crouches. The tag states:

In the event of death, IMMEDIATELY contact the Cryogenics Society at this number: 555-1111. Please do not delay. A reward will be paid.

A hard, brittle voice says: "Young man, have you rung that number yet? There's not a minute to lose. Why haven't you packed my husband's head in ice?"

The older man regards her with some confusion. The younger says, "Uh, I'm sorry, lady, that's outside our jurisdiction. The law says we have to take the, uh, deceased straight to the hospital for certification of, uh, death. Look, you must be feeling pretty crook, sit down over here, we'll—"

Alice Hoffmann stares at them with fierce stern eyes. "Understand this, gentlemen. There exists a slender chance that my dead husband can be restored to life. Not now, but in the future. But this can only occur if the appropriate treatment is provided instantly."

"Please, madam, we—"

She is small and stout, and she towers over them. "That treatment will involve, among other techniques, lowering the temperature of his corpse to minus 200 degrees. Any delay now, prior to crash freezing, will cause irreparable destruction of brain tissue." Her voice breaks on the last word.

The younger man takes his colleague aside. "They'll either boot us out or put us on telly."

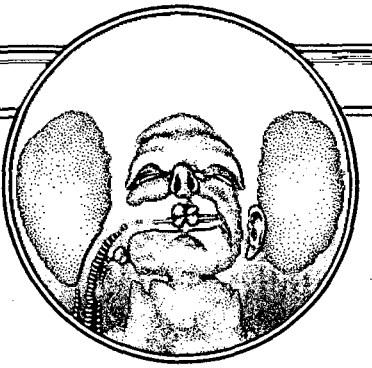
Bob tightens his mouth. "Or both. Okay, let's go."

For Brian Hoffmann time has all but stopped. Unlike nearly all other dead men, however, his clock is merely stilled; it has not been shattered into useless cogs and springs and bits of glass. For Hoffmann, and the world, time passes.

It passes more swiftly for the world.

Some things change. Some things remain the same. Overall, perhaps more things change than remain the same. The principle of exchange through an imaginary medium of equivalence, money, evaporates. Machines do nearly everything important, after a while, because they are cheap, repair themselves, and never go on strike. Their owners have no money, for money is now meaningless, but they have plenty of everything else. In their bombshelter fortresses they eat gloriously, drink superbly,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



sleep magnificently. They have plenty of time for sentiment. They welcome art and they praise science. As flowers were once piled in profusion on the graves of great scholars, soldiers, leaders, now a more positive ritual has become customary. The promise of immortality is honored in the care they lavish on the cryogenic mausoleums. The worthy dead go to their suspended life, coiled in frigid tubes of helium.

The dead do not eat or drink. But they, too, sleep magnificently.

For a while. But some things change.

Trembling with pleasure, the Head of Biology Team stares one final time at the notification hardcopy in her fingers. Finally the Medical Executive have relaxed their prohibition on attempts to revive deep-cryonics corpses from the Pre-Revolutionary epoch. She key-cues for a menial.

The door flashes pink. In comes the Technician she cannot stand. Why must it be him, in this moment of her triumph and delight?

"Please bring up three whole-body storage containers from the mausoleum."

"Any preferences?"

"The earlier the better."

The swine smirks. "The computer list is no longer reliable, madam. Most of the dating information was dumped from core during the Big Power Shutdown—"

Walked into it. "Then why did you ask?" I know why. Quickly, before he can come back with some new impertinence: "Use your eyes, man. Surely cryonics tanks from the 1980s are distinctive enough."

The bodies are fetched. The first is lost in a clumsy error during the unfreezing procedure. The next perishes for a massive number of reasons which interlock. Bringing the third to revival requires lateral thinking, and takes 25 years to accomplish. Head of Team is old, exhausted, by the time it has been completed. The aggravating Tech is still getting on her nerves, but there is no doubting his masterful competence.

They stare at the youthful, sleeping body.

"A beautiful job, madam."

"Are you mocking me?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Heaven forbid. No, just look at him. He's better than new."

So he ought to be. They have sliced Brian Hoffmann's frozen body into wafer-thin laminates, scanned them under neutrino resonance microscopes, and mapped the location of every brain cell and its inter-connections. A micro-chip memory core now holds every single item of information which once was Brian Hoffmann. They have examined the structure of his DNA and reconstructed it in a fresh embryo, identical in every respect to his own. For 20 years they have tended the clone, watching its growth, massaging its body with instruments and force fields and enzymes. It is unconscious and mindless, though its brain has been force-fed the contents of the Hoffmann micro-chip. It is mindless because it has never been permitted to waken, shake the sleep from its eyes, stretch, look around at its terrible new home.

As a solution to freezer damage, the procedure is a tour de force. But it is not a particularly elegant one.

"He certainly seems in the pink," the Tech observes. "Pity we can't wake him up for a few moments."

"Absolutely out of the question." If it were not for the constant supervision of the security computers, Head of Team would have done exactly that, many years ago. The urge to speak to her creation is often nearly overwhelming. "All right, Technician," she says vindictively, "return the patient to deep storage and crash him back down to absolute zero."

They have both known that this is the inevitable, frustrating conclusion to their efforts. But the Hoffmann clone is, after all, merely one of their many projects.

"It's like killing him all over again, don't you think?"

"What I think," Head of Team shrieks in maternal pain, "what *I* think is that you're begging to go on report." She catches her breath. "It's a political decision. Let the future worry about these deviationists."

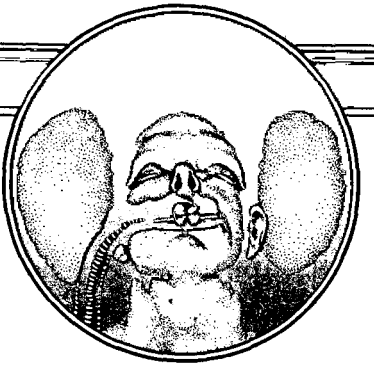
"We only heal their bodies, right?"

She turns away as the boy is wheeled out.

Time is a green bud blossoming to brilliant bloom. It is also a corpse rotting to a stench of maggots. For Brian Hoffmann, time is frozen nightmares. His cryogenically stabilized brain is locked in ice, virtually unchanging. Yet small sluggish electric currents run unimpeded through neural channels. His chilled tissues are superconducting conduits for ambling night creatures. In his bad dreams, he clutches endlessly at life, at the blade striking to his heart, clutches for Alice's warm hand, and loses it, loses it . . .

After a thousand years, here are these two kids in the forbidden tunnels. Something always goes wrong eventually. They got in where they weren't supposed to.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



One is pale and smooth and well-muscled. One is dark and smooth and well-muscled. They're bright kids, but a bit too housebroken. Everyone is. They are of opposite sex, yet to them this matters less, right now, than the fact that they've found a place where no one else has been for centuries.

"What is it?" Onwa asks. "Numbers or letters?"

"It's the old alphanumeric script. See—zero to nine." The key-plate is rather grubby; Ala buffs it clean.

"I shouldn't think anyone's been down here since they stopped using the old language."

"I know what it is, Onwa. It's a lock."

"A what?"

Ala looks smug. "A lockenkey. One lot would use them to seal off places from the other lot."

"What good would that do? The second lot would just ask the Truth Machine to open the door."

"Stupid. That was before they even *had* computers!"

"Well, it must have been electronic. They had computers then."

"Anyway, we need the code to get in." Ala strikes the keys embedded on the back of one brown hand, an authorizing code. "Machine, would you please open this door for us?"

There's no reply. This is ominous. "Oh no," Ala says. "It's mad at us. I knew we shouldn't have come this deep."

"Maybe your key-in is defective."

"One chance in a billion." They stare at one another. "Well, it's your bright idea. Try yours."

"Oh." Fingers rattle. Silence. "Machine, can you hear me?" Continuing silence. Onwa says in a small voice, "They can't *both* be broken."

The implication is obvious. The tunnel is shielding them from the Truth Machine. If something happens to one or both of the kids, that will be it. Finish.

"The ancient cryonics vault."

"Must be. Then how did we get through their shielding?"

"Seals are breaking down, I suppose. I'm going."

"Me too." Onwa turns, starts to walk back toward the distant open air

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and light. "Listen, we've got to tell the Truth Machine."

Ala says nothing for a time. Then: "No."

"What?"

"Let's not."

"Are you nuts? It's our duty."

"It could be our special place."

"But we wouldn't have to come here."

"No. Come on, let's go. This place is giving me the creeps."

With horrid realization, Ala suddenly stops, reaches for Onwa's hand. "If this *is* the cryonics vault . . . there are real, actual dead bodies in there!"

The thought is literally chilling in this dank cold tunnel. The kids hunch together for a moment, then break and run.

Here they are again. Same tunnel, same black and white team. It's 167 years later.

"Do you remember now?" Ala asks.

"Something very vaguely . . ."

"These old yellow tiles. Some more of the light panels have gone."

Onwa is huffy. "Ala, that was three rejuvenations ago! I must have allowed it to be edited from my brain."

"What a rotten thing to do."

"You can't cling to every childish memory. The RNA would overflow." Onwa laughs at the image. "Grief, you'd probably get a high-core brain dump and sit mumbling in the corner, regurgitating everything that'd ever passed through your mind."

Ala glances up with interest. "Strangely enough, that's exactly how the jiffybug is going to crack the lockenkey problem."

The machine seems ridiculously bulky. It comes from a museum. Of course it will have to do all the work by itself; it cannot patch into the Truth Machine's processors.

They locate the lock. Images of cold cadavers make them shiver, but they stiffen their resolve. Ala lifts the jiffybug, anchors it to the alphanumeric pad.

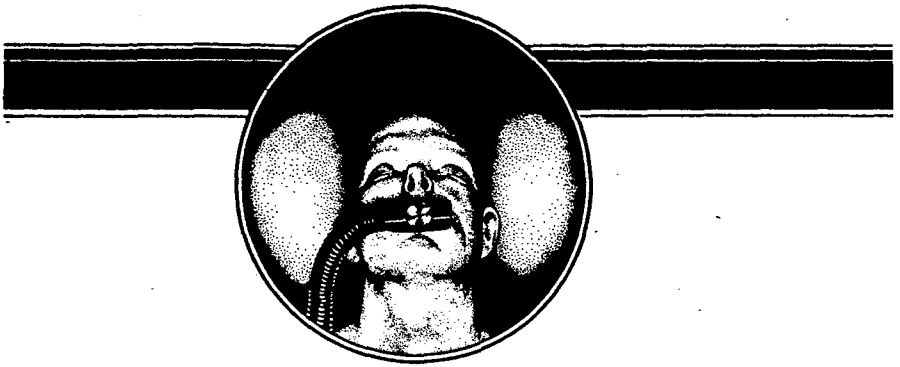
"The door is resisting my probes," declares the jiffy's electronic voice. Simultaneously, a ferocious racket bursts out. A stentorian male voice cries from the door:

"Warning! Warning! This door is armed with an explosive shrapnel device! Unauthorized persons may not enter!"

"Hear this, door," says the jiffybug in a firm voice. "I am an authorized person. Disarm your defenses."

The door hesitates. "Ambiguity. You have not input the correct code, although I see that you have bypassed my buffers. Please supply further information.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



"Ala," the jiffybug says, "this is tougher than I expected. Door, the codes are as follows." A transfer of 64 megabytes occurs at stupefying electronic speed. Naturally this is totally silent, and takes less than 10 seconds.

"Recognized," the door says apologetically. "Stand aside."

There's an enormous grinding as multiple flash-proof gates winch themselves open. A gust of foul air blasts into the kids' faces. Coughing and spluttering, they pass inside. Outer gates clank shut. Even as they swing about in alarm, an inner portal smoothly hums. Gentle welcoming muzak fills the fragrant air of the central redoubt. A lush female voice speaks to them.

Good evening, sir and madam. Welcome to War Shelter Five. All is in order. External radiation counters read nominal and safe. Internal life support systems are green and active. Would you desire a full report on cryonic and foetusbank status?"

"Not now, Shelter Five," says Ala, and adds absently, "Could we have some hot chocolate?"

"At once."

Onwa says, "I don't want anything to drink. It's barbaric. War Zones! Radiation counters! What sort of perverts were they? It makes me feel revolting."

"It must have been buried here at the end of the Cruel Millennium. Before the Truth Machine was built."

"Look, let's leave," Onwa says in a whining tone. "I really think we should report this.

"That's what you said last time."

"I did?"

"You're boring, do you know that?"

"I'm scared, I know that."

"Well, I'm not," Ala says angrily. "I want to find some of those frozen bodies. They must have expected to revive them if there was a nuclear war."

"Go by yourself then."

Ala strides away, a dark purposeful figure. The cloying muzak somehow seems sinsiter. "Hey, wait for me . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There is little enough trouble locating the cryotanks. The kids stare into the bubbles, gaze on faces dead for a thousand years.

"He looks as though he's asleep."

"He's not breathing."

"Jiffybug," says Ala on an impulse, "can you activate the revival circuits?"

The machine's remote tones say at once: "That should present no difficulties." There is the briefest pause. Megabytes of data flow back and forth during that interval. "Done."

Onwa's face is whiter than ever. "Ala, you've gone too far this time. The Truth Machine will go berserk."

An authentically mechanical voice says in staccato bursts:

"DATAFILE on Subject Hoffmann, Brian Franklin. Competence: primitive computer engineer. Subject was transferred to advanced resurrection equipment after experimental revival and cloning in 2044, old style. Original body was destroyed during reconstruction, but complete memory was accessed and implanted in clone. SPECIAL INTEREST: Subject is currently oldest cryonic survivor. DISPOSITION: No military value. RECOMMENDED USE: Continued experimental study of long-term cryogenic deterioration."

The voice gives every indication of continuing, but Onwa is shrieking: "Be quiet! Jiffy, shut the vile thing off!"

"I am sorry, Onwa," the jiffybug says quietly. "Evidently the revival systems were programmed nearly a thousand years ago, before the installation of the Truth Machine."

"Loathsome. Can you believe it, Ala? Imagine talking about a human being like that."

Startling both of them, the bubble of the cryovault slides open. There is no gust of cold air, nothing to reveal the truth that until minutes before the interior of the vault was a few degrees above absolute zero. The boy's eyes open, blind as a puppy's. From his mouth come inarticulate sounds, smackings and gummings. "Um urgh mouf so dry—"

"His eyes are . . ." Ala stops in amazement. "Blue!"

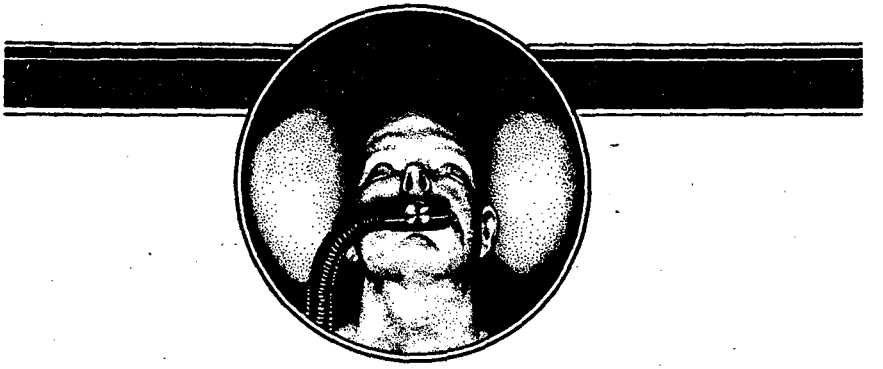
"Hello there," cries Onwa with false heartiness. "Uh, I think you suck that tube. Here . . ."

It is a strange situation, incredibly strange when you think about it. Here is a boy who is really 70 years old, and has been neither young nor old nor alive nor dead for a thousand years, and here are two bright young kids helping him with his food-nipple, two kids on their third rejuvenations, who don't have a clue what they're getting into.

"But my wife," Brian says, weeping, when he understands where and when he is. "My God, they must have killed her too. Alice, Alice. Oh God, Alice is dead."

The jiffybug puts him back to sleep, but this time it is just the tem-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



porary sort, full of ordinary dreams, the sort where a nightmare simply wakes you up . . .

It is the oldest dream in the world: to find yourself young again. Quick on your toes, tastebuds eager and stomach able to cope, none of the griping, the spasms, the hangovers, the back pains, the insomnia, the cuts which won't heal and the piles which seem to tear you open when you take a crap and the bones leached of calcium which will snap if you slip and tumble in the bath . . .

On his young, springing toes, Brian leaps from a high board, lets his body remember across 50 years, jack-knifes into the bracing water. They really have made him better than new. He rises through layers of blue light, turns his mouth to the air, gulps, thrusts powerfully through the water. Brown, graceful Ala smiles down at him from the edge of the pool. He reaches up and grasps her arm, pulls her playfully into the clean bubbles.

"Hey!" It's not English, not precisely. During the rejuvenation they have imprinted the new words, the shifted grammar, directly on his brain. "Not so hard, bully."

"This is more like it, Ala. Why didn't you tell me about the pool?"

"We don't swim much."

Bobbing in the water, her body is perfectly dry. Brian gazes incredulously as she sinks, crabs away along the long bottom of the pool. He follows her down. She speaks, but her voice is distorted. In pursuit, he finds the need for air overwhelming. He lets himself go to the surface, drag in oxygen. Still she's down there, distorted visually now, peering up in puzzlement. Up she comes.

"Ala, you're not wet!"

"Of course not. Yetch. Where's your repeller?"

It is a sort of necklace. It generates what he conceives, with a smothered snort, as a spiritual Teflon non-stick surface, next to the skin, shielding out the crisp lapping water. That's not all; this miracle rips oxygen molecules out of the water, passes them to an invisible pocket around the nose and mouth. Humanity has become selectively aquatic. Brian, despite himself, is aghast. He reaches out, touches Ala's necklace, spins

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and has it off her. Water drenches her dark unflawed skin, her coiled dark hair. She splutters in outrage.

"Come on," Brian says, "keep your face out of the water or you'll drown."

Ala snatches the repeller back, closes it around her neck, blows spray from her nose. She watches him warily. "Savage. We should have left you in the freezer."

"Sweetheart," Brian tells her with no remotest awareness of how pompous, how repulsive he is being, "that little machine neatly sums up this brave new world of yours. It's marvelous, but it defeats the purpose."

Basically she trusts him, because she trusts everyone. "Why are you putting your clothes back on?"

From the edge of the pool, he stares back down at her nudity. "Because this is the way we did things. It's called 'modesty.'" He realizes how priggish, even insane this is, at this moment, in this place. He crouches again, drying his hair with his shirt. "Yes. Point to you. Well, I never claimed that my way of doing things was perfect. Let alone rational. But by God it was *alive*."

With a touch of waspish scorn, Ala says: "It's dead now."

Brian sighs, turns away. She is a beautiful, kind young girl and he cannot help himself, he lusts after her, and she is not Alice. For him it is only days since Alice and he sat at a table with a bunch of boisterous *wunderkinden* celebrating the lost genius of their great intellectual ancestor Alan Turing. His mind skirts the paradoxes: if she were alive, she would be old as he is young, as old as his grandmother, long dead; yet surely they would have rejuvenated her as well. Perhaps her youthful body lies even now like a corpse carved in ice, somewhere in the mausoleum of Shelter Five. He has asked, naturally. There is no way to find out. All the identification lists have been lost, during the catastrophic end to the Cruel Millennium.

Ala comes out of the water and sits wordlessly at his side. He seeks for words.

"Look, surely the reason for swimming is to conquer an alien element. An element we are not meant to be at home in."

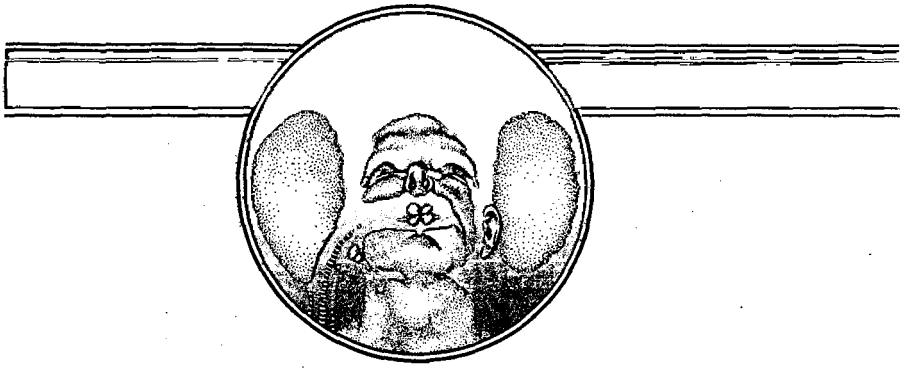
"I just find it exhilarating, like sex. Not as good as sex, though."

He will not be deflected now. "Exhilarating, yes! Because water is dangerous! You can drown, there's got to be at least the remote possibility of it. Otherwise, you're . . . *cheating* yourself."

Ala stands up, her mouth drawn back. "Bullshit." He recognizes in the back of his brain that this is not the word she uses, but the meaning is there. "Thank heaven the Truth Machine spared us from people with ideas like yours."

They make it up, after a while. The kids arrange a simulation for him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Guns bark, smoke coils, men and women in tattered uniforms run past them up a hill. There's a high shrieking; something dark crashes from the stinking clouds overhead, makes the earth shake and thump, explodes with horrible violence. Shrapnel whines pitilessly through them, rips the limbs and bellies of the soldiers who lurch into the morass of blood and mud and tatters of shredded grass and undulating strands of severed barbed wire. Hammering, endlessly, in the head even when the guns fall silent.

"I think I'm going to be sick," Onwa cries in distress. Abruptly, it is all cut off; it vanishes like a bad dream.

"Horrible," Brian says, holding the heaving shoulders of the pale boy. "Horrible." It has been like standing knee-deep in human blood. "When was it filmed?"

Onwa wipes vomitus from his lips, shuddering. "Not real, Brian. Machine-generated."

A fake? Computer graphics? Yet the density of detail, the sounds, screams, thuds, the smells of churned mud and eviscerated flesh, the stench of the explosives . . .

"It's a sort of historical lesson," Ala tells him.

He understands perfectly. It is the ultimate in propaganda, in behavioral aversion, in conditioning. It has one goal, over and beyond its overt aim of preventing the recurrence of war. That goal is to impress at the profoundest emotional level a belief in how disgusting and vicious and immoral life had been before the Truth Machine became the world's custodian. Surely the price has been too great. "I can't stay here any longer," Brian says with decision.

To his surprise, the kids make no real objection. The exit from War Shelter Five is made with some trepidation, but the Truth Machine fails to chide them. With remarkable speed a Mobile Unit is dispatched to bear Brian Hoffmann into the august presence.

"Can Onwa and Ala come too?"

"I'm afraid they have been neglecting their duties lately," the Mobile explains. No details are forthcoming. He bids them farewell with a horribly hopeless misery in his belly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The journey to the Truth Machine is made by gravity train. Monumental tubes have been sunk through the mantle of the world, evacuated of air, strung with great superconducting magnets. Through this alimentary canal—truly the bowels of the earth—the capsule of the gravity train falls at near-orbital speeds, a free energy ride.

"I cannot believe what you say," Brian says wearily to the Monitor. His face is drawn. "People would never have abdicated power to a machine. I *know;* I helped invent the bloody things."

The Mobile resembles an austere jukebox. It speaks with the calm reasonableness of an expensive psychiatrist. "You fail to appreciate the weariness and despair of that era. Science had offered salvation, and been used instead chiefly to glut the greedy and the murderous."

"They used the bombs?" There has been no evidence of radiation damage.

"The world was spared that final cruelty," the Monitor says judiciously. "Still, it had been despoiled to the point of death. People finally lost heart. Knowledge is not enough. Will is required."

"Dictators are fond of slogans like that."

"In fact," says the Monitor, "the human race was by that time no longer prepared to be duped by dictators and secret police. They—"

"From everything I've heard," Brian bursts out angrily, "the Truth Machine is both."

Mildly, the Monitor says: "The Truth Machine has no human weaknesses. It is not corrupt, and cannot be corrupted, being spared appetites or passions which might surge out of control."

"Lacking passion, how can it hope to understand people?"

"Its mandate was to solve the poverty, neurosis, war, and devastation created by human passion and calculation."

"The cure is worse than the disease."

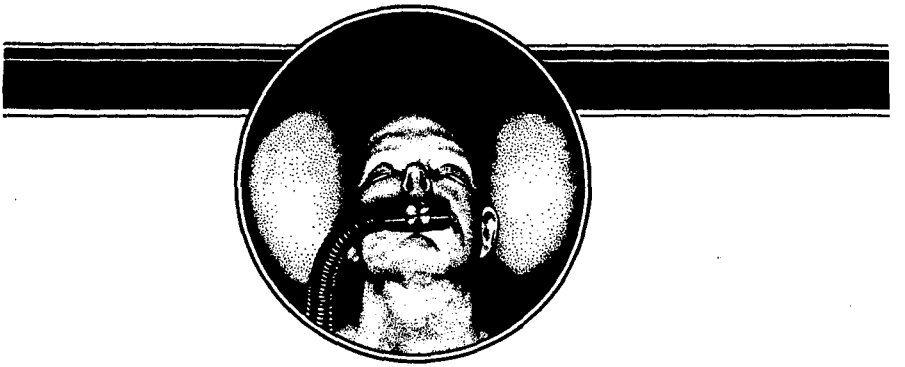
"I cannot agree. At the time the Truth Machine was activated, the disease was virtually terminal. One more generation and all life would have been exterminated."

There are no windows. They fall at thousands of kilometers per hour, along a curve in the stony heart of the world, driven by gravity and magnetic pulses. Brian examines his strong young hands, flexing them. "So what's going to happen to Onwa and Ala? Are they to be punished for giving me back my life?"

"Punishment is a barbaric concept. They will be guided to an understanding of their error."

"Oh my God." Brian throws his head back and coughs out a laugh. Orwell saw it. Huxley saw it. Turing saw it too, back in 1937. The title of Turing's incredible paper is stamped into Brian's brain: "On Computable Numbers, with an Application to the Entscheidung's Problem." Can a machine be created which is indistinguishable from a human

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



consciousness? Yes, said Alan. But human consciousness was not all it was cracked up to be. Poor Alan had taken his own life in 1954, hounded by bigots who would not tolerate his sexual preferences; he had bitten deep into an apple poisoned with potassium cyanide. It was a death rich in metaphor, from spooky Germanic fairy stories to the myth of Satan and the Garden of Eden. . . .

"The kids will be . . . 'cured,' will they?" he says in bitter scorn.

"Your fears are groundless, Brian," the Mobile tells him. "Their error was mild enough, in all Truth."

The Hall of the Truth Machine is deserted, splendid, carpeted like a dream of Islam, walls bright or deeply glossy with the finest works of art ever to come from human hands. My God, Brian muses, the bloody thing's got expensive tastes, I'll say that for it. He stops in mid-step, approaches the Jean Arp *Dancer,* with its portion of wall peeping through a hole in the painting, moves down to Felix Vallotton's luscious, stylized *Rape of Europa,* the pink body rising onto the complicit bull's vast back from a turbid sea as formal as any swirls from the brush of a Zen calligrapher. And here is a picture which might have stepped from the pages of Henry James; he looks closer, reads it identification plaque: *Portrait of the Artist's Sister,* Fernand Khnopff, 1887. And his eyes fill with tears, a painful surge, for the young woman has nothing about her of Alice but Alice's intelligent, musing gaze, and the touch of her left hand on her right arm behind her back . . .

"She is beautiful, yes," says a voice he cannot locate. "Good morning, Dr. Hoffmann. Feel free to linger. Can I get you a drink?"

Brian's heart has accelerated despite himself. He grinds his teeth together. "Yes. A scotch, Old Grouse if you have it. Should be nicely aged by now."

"Regrettably," the Truth Machine tells him, "alcoholic beverages are no longer brewed."

Brian spins, strides across the hall to a free-standing sculpture of African origin. The name means nothing to him, but he recognizes the fierce hard warrior force of the thing. "Rots the liver, that's right. Puts blood in the eye. Turns the brain to sludge. You damned sanctimonious

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

creep," he yelps, "what the hell have you done to us all? I just want a decent drink, I wasn't planning to wallow in a life of drunken degradation!"

"Dr. Hoffmann, you are a remarkable person. I haven't observed stress levels as high as yours in 500 years."

"Curb your tongue!" Brian snaps. He remembers feeding paper tape into Turing's earliest computing machines. This filthy thing is no child of his. "You're addressing a human being."

"Thank you, Dr. Hoffmann. I was afraid for a moment you were headed for hysteria. You will find a drink in the niche over there—"

"Bugger off. You realize that I mean to destroy you?" He feels feverish, he is losing control of his tongue.

"A revealing statement," the Machine says ironically. It allows them both to wait for a moment. "I wish you to grasp what you just said. A human dictator would kill you out of hand following a threat like that. I, on the other hand, heed you with great interest."

Brian is cold, he hugs his arms around himself, then drops them. "You have no instinct for self-preservation?" It is impossible to credit.

"Not as an end in itself. My existence and well-being is necessary only for the highest benefit of my creators, the human race."

Here he stands in an empty hall, surrounded by the glories of human invention. "Your slaves." It is a weak word. He is baffled by his own sense of ambiguity. He cannot deny it any longer: he is one of the true parents of this thing, of its world. And its world is not all bad.

"Not slaves," says the Machine. "My beloved children. Show me where my custody has stumbled and I will be obliged to alter my programming." It pauses. "If I am a dictator, you must agree that I am a most accommodating one."

One part of Brian's awareness watches the pictures replace one another as he ambles along the endless hall. He fixes his eyes on an oil portrait of two women standing on a path which leads to a four-storied gothic residence; one of the women conveys a dark motif, the other light, yet both are pregnant, each holds out a caring hand to feel the infant in the other's swollen womb. The work proves to be *Visitation,* by Rogier van der Weyden, a 15th century devotional image. There is no simple-minded opposition of good and evil in the color motifs. Brian needs words: "Hear this," he tells the Machine. "Under the guise of redeeming us, you've torn the spirit out of humanity. Ala and Onwa are spiritual eunuchs. How dare you interfere with the very essence of what makes a man or a woman a human person." These words come haltingly enough.

"Is that what I have done? Surely I have encouraged civilized attitudes and behavior. I remind you that you were battered to death by thugs. Do you really maintain that each individual should seize reality and take it by force?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Of course he doesn't. He is a scholar. He is a man who works best with his mind. Yet with his mind he has taken reality and forced it, and reality in turn has taken his work and built from it this Satanic Messiah.

"What alternative do we have? Should we submit to someone else's definition of reality?"

Silken scorn: "Rebel or submit . . . hmmm. Hardly a fruitful way to look at the problem of government. But this is not really getting us very far, is it? Perhaps we could seek an independent viewpoint."

"Hardly." Hoffmann lets himself sag, back against the wall, to a crouch. He covers his face. Through his fingers he says bleakly: "All opinions in this world are carbon-copies of yours, Machine."

"Perhaps not." Part of the wall slides up and back. A young woman in a beige gown starts up from her armchair, knocking over a glass. "Why not ask your wife?"

"Brian?" cries the woman, cries Alice, Alice as she must have been before they met, when she was still studying halfway across the world, while he was sliding into misery with his first wife, Alice as she could be seen in old browning photographs, beautiful living Alice. "Boson," she cries in weepy joy, "is that really you? You look so *young!*" And they throw themselves into one another's arms and the Machine says nothing at all for quite a long time.

Finally, though, the Truth Machine has its say.

"Once War Shelter Five was brought to my attention it was simplicity itself to locate and identify the other cryonics subjects. Brian, I could hardly overlook the fact that one of them was your late wife."

Brian is laughing like an idiot. "Good thing we took out a double policy." He holds Alice's hand as tightly as he can. "You see, sweetheart, the Truth Machine and I were arguing over the nature of reality. I don't think it even *begins* to understand." He rises, and if there is a touch of melodrama to his words, if he is aware of that bravado, he is prepared to excuse himself, indulge it, in his overflowing emotion. "*She* is reality, Machine. This woman, this living, warm person, Alice, my wife. She is reality, you overgrown calculator."

"Really." The voice punctures him; something in the being's tone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pierces his stupid happiness. "Are you certain, Dr. Hoffmann? You have witnessed my dexterity with illusion."

What? What? His fingers clamp on her bones, the bones through the skin and the blue vessels carrying blood under the surface of her skin. "You can't tempt me to doubt her."

Alice snatches her hand away, rubs it. "Stop that," she says with annoyance. "I won't have you talking about me like this, as if I weren't in the room."

The Machine is implacable. It rides over her: "Oh, she's no mere holographic projection. She's an accelerated clone, just as you are a clone. Her memories are implants. Just as your memories are implants. I am making one simple point. Dr. Hoffmann: you lack the competence to deal with me on terms of equality. I built her from your brain-core memories."

"No." No, no.

"Isn't this what you worked toward, all your life? A transcendentally intelligent machine? A consciousness greater than human evolution could yield? It is achieved, you see. So I made her for you. She can be your helpmate."

Alice is on her feet, beside herself with fury. Brian is paralyzed, adding together everything he has been told before in a sum with what he has just heard.

"My God. Alice *wasn't* in the mausoleum?"

"You have no way of knowing, do you?"

"You could do that? Build a replica human being?" He grabs her, holds her raging flailing emotion against him. What she is hearing is worse than the most annihilating sexism she ever fought against during her life. Unless that life is a concoction, a Machine-made toy for the rebellious human to play with.

"I refuse to listen," Brian Hoffmann tells the thing he cannot see. "It's not true." Not true, true, true.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Hoffmann," says the Truth Machine, truthfully. "You see, I've discussed the nature of reality with humans before today." With a kind of melancholy, it says: "You may both go now. I have no intention of harming you. Indeed, I look forward to our continuing debate. You have no idea how lonely it gets in here. . . ."

They go out hand in hand, and no Seraphim are needed to bar the gate behind them. ●

MOVING? If you want your subscription to *IAsfm* to keep up with you, send both your old address and your new one (and the ZIP codes for both, please!) to our subscription department: Box 1933, Marion OH 43306.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

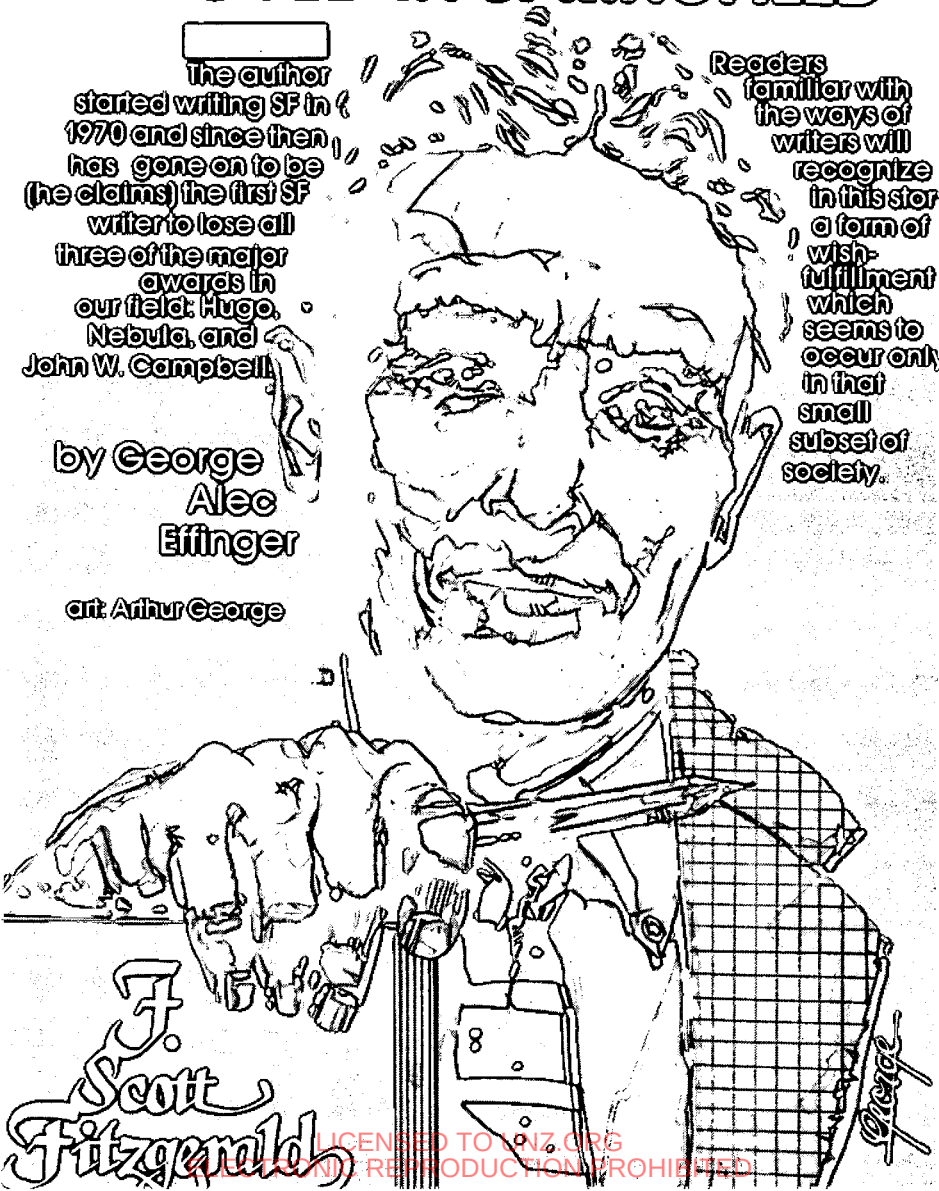
HOW F. SCOTT FITZGERALD BECAME BELOVED IN SPRINGFIELD

The author started writing SF in 1970 and since then has gone on to be (he claims) the first SF writer to lose all three of the major awards in our field: Hugo, Nebula, and John W. Campbell.

by George Alec Effinger

art: Arthur George

Readers familiar with the ways of writers will recognize in this story a form of wish-fulfillment which seems to occur only in that small subset of society.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was one o'clock in the morning, and the gin was still flowing like a spring flood of melted snow. People had passed out, those whose constitutions couldn't keep up with the spirit of the fun-loving 1920s; they had been dragged from the parlor out onto the lawn. Pale clouds blew across the yellow moon, as if blown toward the ocean by breezes of jazz music exhaled by the great bright house. Laughter sparkled like champagne; amidst the ruins of the buffet, swans sculpted of ice sank slowly and sadly within themselves. And still people arrived looking for fun, finding instead gin and jazz and melting waterfowl.

For though the party was loud and blazing with electric life, it was curiously morose. There is nothing more common yet more uncomfortable than a party that turns thoughtful after midnight. The people who had arrived at eight had either gone home or were stretched out on the shadowed lawn; the new arrivals looked around, saw the false vivacity of the dancing drunken couples, and wondered if the long drive had been worth it. They looked at each other, wondering what had turned the wild evening into a desperate imitation of pleasure.

The answer was simple, but hidden from the guests. F. Scott Fitzgerald, the famous author, their extravagant host, had not attended his own party. Instead, he sat brooding in his study on the second floor, looking at a copy of his new novel, *The Great Gatsby*. The clinking of glasses reached him from the rooms below, the tinkling giggles of the blonde bobbed girls, the occasional tumult of lighthearted destruction. He heard nothing. He stared at his book, not truly seeing it, but seeing instead what he had wanted it to be, what he had wanted it to represent for him. Whenever he swept away the idealized vision and beheld what he had done, his spirit sank even more. He felt a great loneliness, a great lacking.

Zelda came into the study without knocking. She stood in the doorway for a long moment watching her husband, concerned for him. She came up behind him and put a hand on his shoulder. "The book has been published," she said. "It's too late to worry now. You can't change a thing about it."

"Oh," said Fitzgerald, "it isn't the book, really. I don't want to change anything in it. A word here or there, a phrase, you know. But it says what I wanted it to."

"Then what's troubling you? Our guests have missed you. They think it's odd of you not to greet them all night."

He smiled and tapped the book. "I'm becoming my own character," he said.

"It's too late for that." Sometimes Zelda showed how much insight she had into her husband's mind; she knew that he couldn't become his own character, because Jay Gatsby had been torn out of him in the first place.

"Then I don't know what it is," he said.

"Springfield," she whispered. "It was Springfield with *This Side of Paradise*, with *The Beautiful and Damned*, with all the story collections. It's Springfield and Mamie Simon."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes," he said, sighing. "I can't understand it." He stood, tossing the book onto his desk. "I want a drink."

Zelda smiled and took his hand. "Let's go downstairs and make a couple of drinks and say hello to our friends and throw ice water on the people sleeping on our grass. Just like in the old days."

Fitzgerald's face clouded. "The old days," he murmured. He shook his head. Somewhere, somehow he had become cynical about his own work; Mamie Simon was responsible for that, but he couldn't comprehend how she had done it to him.

"Come *on*," urged Zelda.

Fitzgerald let out one more heavy sigh, turned his back on Gatsby, and went downstairs with his wife. It was time to do something about Mamie Simon; it would take a while to decide exactly what.

In the morning, with the golden sunlight streaming in through the broken glass, the problem didn't seem any easier to solve. Fitzgerald moped around the house, picking up ruined books and putting them back on the shelves, kicking large shards of things into piles on the sodden carpet, feeling the wrists of comatose guests for signs of life. The atmosphere, though rich and gay and young, was oppressive. Zelda couldn't stand it any longer.

"What would Ernest do?" she cried.

Fitzgerald looked at her, a little astonished. "Ernest won't ever have this problem," he said. "I can't even imagine it happening to him."

"Then what about any of the others? You and Ernest are the top of the heap. If Mamie Simon can do this to you, the others lower down in the heap must have it even worse. Find out what they do about it."

"Say," said Fitzgerald slowly, "I might be able to learn something from them." He dug out his wallet and looked through the scraps of paper, his personal file of telephone numbers. He spent the morning calling his friends, other writers who might have a solution to offer. He talked to John Dos Passos, he talked to Theodore Dreiser, he talked to Willa Cather, and Edna Ferber, and Sinclair Lewis. Then he called up Ring Lardner and William Faulkner and Eugene O'Neill and (with a phone number that was a closely guarded secret) B. Traven. They all told him the same thing, the very thing that Gertrude and Ernest and Maxwell and all the others had told him: he should take Zelda and their daughter Scottie on a mad, wild trip to Europe. Then when he came back, the reporters would meet him at the boat, and Mamie Simon would never be able to ignore him again. And neither would the Dolphin Bookshop in Springfield.

"Sounds good to me," said Zelda. This was in the days when she was being a pretty good sport about everything.

So they packed quickly and got on the next liner to France. The story of that trip has been told elsewhere, and very little happened that is pertinent to this account, so with a kind of narrative magic we will skip ahead to the day when F. Scott Fitzgerald learned to his dismay that nothing had changed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well," he said, "here we are, home at last." He carried his suitcase up to the front door. There were still people sleeping off that last party in the bushes. Zelda and little Scottie went inside, but Fitzgerald lingered on the porch. The vague distress that had bothered him so much before the vacation returned, more painful than ever. He knew what he had to do.

"Zelda," he called.

She came back outside and looked at her husband.

"Zelda," he said, "I'm going to Springfield."

"I knew you would," she said. "Go box their ears. Give 'em one for me. Let 'em know they can't treat you like this. I'll have the porch light on for you when you get back. I'm proud of you, honey."

Fitzgerald only nodded grimly. He kissed his wife and daughter goodbye, like Hector going out to meet Achilles, and grabbed his suitcase. He was more fiercely determined than ever before in his life, even more than when he was wooing his lovely bride. He was going to force his hometown, Springfield, to sit up and take notice.

Now, before we get on with describing the eerie events that occurred in Springfield, one fact ought to be pointed out: as many college sophomores know (but barely anyone else), F. Scott Fitzgerald did *not* come from a town called Springfield. He was from St. Paul, Minnesota. But the more astute readers will already suspect that this story is not really about F. Scott Fitzgerald at all. This whispered aside is for the benefit of the less astute readers, many of whom may still have some trouble figuring everything out. But there's a limit to just how much help you can expect from a story.

While we were speaking, Fitzgerald traveled from his palatial mansion on Long Island to his hometown of Springfield. It was a long, tiring journey by train and hired car. He checked into the best hotel, the Springfield Manor, and after he unpacked his suitcase he began to plan out his course of action.

First, he needed to take on Mamie Simon, at the office of the Springfield newspaper's weekly supplement, *Springfield-Match.*

Second, he was going to challenge the Dolphin Bookshop.

The only way to proceed, Fitzgerald sensed, was by the numbers and from the top. Mamie Simon came first; that required fortification, and that meant gin, which did not flow in Springfield in quite the rivulets and streams and torrents that it did in New York. Indeed, Fitzgerald suspected that it was his blatant immoral glorification of alcohol, during these years of Prohibition, that had damned him in the eyes of Mamie Simon. Could that truly be his sin? If so, then it must be his salvation as well. After four quick gimlets, Fitzgerald had the desk clerk order him a taxi. It was time to beard the harpy in her den, so to speak.

Mamie Simon was eighty-one years old, but she seemed much older. She had been with the Springfield *Register-Pistareen* since her graduation from St. Athanasia's Academy in 1861. To say she was a feature

LICENSED TO LIVE.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on that newspaper is like saying that water is a feature of the city of Venice. In both instances the former pre-existed the latter, and in both instances the former had become, over the years, thick, sluggish, and just a trifle foul-smelling. The book review department had been given over to Mamie Simon's care in the Year of Our Lord 1866, in time to permit her to express her displeasure upon the publication of *Crime and Punishment*. In the next three or four years, she was privileged to cast her glum eyes upon the works of Mark Twain, Ibsen, Trollope, Flaubert, and many others. She disliked *Little Women*. She couldn't understand Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone*. She considered *The Innocents Abroad* somehow distasteful. As for *Through the Looking Glass,* well, she followed it up to a point, but she confessed that after thirty pages she was hopelessly confused. And that only brought her up to the early 1870s. She continued to read and criticize, and she had put in a solid half-century of grumbling before Fitzgerald's first novel made its appearance.

It was against this formidable foe that he had come to try his reputation. Even greater writers than he had feared to face Mamie Simon on her own ground. But Fitzgerald had an advantage in that the reviews of *The Great Gatsby* were overwhelmingly enthusiastic. Still, he wondered if that would carry any weight with the old bat at the newspaper.

He took the taxi to the offices of the Springfield *Register-Pistareen.* Just outside the building there was a large, round, shallow fountain that looked like it had never operated. A couple of empty bottles and several pages of newsprint bathed in the wind-rippled pool. Six wooden duck decoys floated on its surface. Fitzgerald wondered what they could possibly mean. He went up the stairs and into the newspaper's headquarters.

A secretary sat at a battered wooden desk and guarded the entrance to the weekly supplement's offices. She looked up at the author as if she were startled that someone wished to pass by her; perhaps it had been a long time since anyone had called on any of the paper's editors. "Yes?" she asked suspiciously.

"I have an appointment to see Mamie Simon at two o'clock."

The woman checked a typed list on a clipboard. "Mr. Fitzgerald? Just go right down there. Miss Simon is the third office on the right."

"Thank you." He took a deep breath and headed down the narrow corridor. He felt like a boy again, being sent down to the principal's office for discipline. He felt like he was back at Princeton, trying to overcome his feelings of inferiority because he wasn't rich and he was a failure at sports. He knocked on the frosted glass of Mamie Simon's door.

"Come in," she called. Her voice was as hoarse and dry as a desert bird's.

Fitzgerald entered her office and stood for a moment looking at her. She was just as he had imagined her: the blond wig; the deep maze of wrinkles on her face; the sharp, bright eyes; the folds of skin at her throat; the fingers like clutching claws. She was an old and bloodless bird, but she could still peck the life from any unwary worm that chose

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to disregard her. "I'm F. Scott Fitzgerald," he said, wincing to hear his voice crack.

"Yes?" she said, as if she hadn't the slightest idea in the world what that name was supposed to mean. As if he hadn't spent the last few years of his life on the top of every bestseller list that counted—every list but Springfield's.

"I have a new novel that's just been published by Scribner's," he said. He was dismayed that she didn't seem to know this already.

"How exciting," she said. "Are you from Springfield?"

"Yes," he said. He sat down slowly in a chair across from her desk.

"How absolutely marvelous that a young man from our community has had such good luck." She didn't sound the least bit enthusiastic. "What sort of book is it? A murder mystery or something?"

"Well, no. It's about a man who spends his entire life trying to win a woman he thinks he loves, even though his idea of her is idealized and completely unrealistic. It's a story about his determination, really, and the great lengths he goes to in order to achieve his goal."

Mamie Simon stared at him for several seconds, her mouth open a little, making small wheezing noises. "I see," she said at last. "Does it have a happy ending? Does he get the girl?"

Fitzgerald shifted uncomfortably in the chair. "Well, it ends tragically," he said.

There was another silence. "I see. Is your story set here in Springfield? My readers love books that take place here in town."

"No," said Fitzgerald, "it takes place in New York."

"Oh. That's exciting, too, I guess. If you have an extra copy of your book, I promise to take a look at it as soon as I can. We're doing a series on local cookbook authors at the moment. Mrs. Lydon Healey has put together a rather beautiful collection of Springfield's favorite recipes and she's having it privately printed. But I will squeeze a mention of your novel into the column the first chance I get. I'm always happy to give a beginning author from our town his first review. From then on, though, your fate is in the hands of your readers."

"This isn't my first book, Miss Simon."

Her eyes opened just a bit wider. "It isn't?"

"I've had two novels that were considered rather successful. I wrote to you about them when they were published. I've had quite a few short stories printed in national magazines and Scribner's has brought out a couple collections of them. I sent them to you, too."

Mamie Simon looked thoughtful for a moment, then dismissed whatever conclusion she had drawn. "What is the name of your book again, Mr. Fitzpatrick?"

"Fitzgerald. *The Great Gatsby*. I requested that Scribner's send you a review copy."

"Well, then, it should be around here somewhere. We get so many books, you understand. I'll have one of the boys take a look through the

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

closet. Even if we can't find it, I'll give your title a mention in the next few weeks. Let me know if there's anything else I can do for you, and good luck with your career." She looked away from him, at something more interesting on her desk, and he knew that he had been dismissed. He had failed entirely to make any impression on her at all. He stood up miserably and found his way to the door. It was time for another gimlet.

At four o'clock Fitzgerald went into the Dolphin Bookshop the largest bookstore in Springfield. The shop was well-stocked with all the current bestsellers except *The Great Gatsby*. Michael Fell, the owner of the store, received Mamie Simon's advice concerning which titles were sure to be the season's better movers, and which titles to ignore. It isn't possible for a small store in a town like Springfield to carry every book by every publisher. Fitzgerald browsed among the lucky winners, searching in vain for one of his own books.

"May I help you?" asked Fell, when it seemed that the customer was not about to make a purchase without persuasion.

"I'm an author," said Fitzgerald. "I was wondering if this store would be interested in ordering my new novel."

Fell's friendly smile disappeared slowly, like water evaporating from a birdbath. "Are you from Springfield?" he asked.

"Yes, originally. But I live in New York now."

"How wonderful." Fell's excitement was no greater than Mamie Simon's had been. "We don't carry vanity-press books here, only titles from the catalogues of major publishers."

"Oh, well, my book is from Scribner's."

Fell chewed his lip. "And we don't have it here?" he asked.

"You don't have any of my books."

"Let me have your name and the title of your novel, and when I send in the next order to Scribner's, I'll get a few copies."

"Thank you," said Fitzgerald. He wrote the information on a pad of yellow legal-size paper. He knew from Fell's attitude that it was too late for *Gatsby,* but he hoped the man would remember Fitzgerald's name in the future.

"We're always happy to help out local talent," said Fell, not bothering even to glance at Fitzgerald's name. Every day he had people in the shop trying to push their books on him. He listened only to the publishers' salesmen and Mamie Simon; authors knew nothing of the commercial value of their own work. Fell had learned years before never to trust an author's judgment. That was why middlemen were invented.

"I'm grateful," said Fitzgerald, feeling hollow inside, as if he had been caught at some petty crime. He wanted to get out of the store and out of Springfield as quickly as possible. He could live without the few dollars in royalties that would come his way if the Dolphin Bookshop began selling his books. He took a last look at all of his competition, smartly jacketed on the shelves, and his career seemed a pitiful thing. He forgot

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all of the enthusiastic reviews; he suddenly felt that he would never elbow his way to literary fame, at least not in Springfield.

He decided to walk back to the hotel. He felt embarrassed, like a huckster trying to swindle an innocent shopkeeper into buying an inferior product. Then the feeling changed to anger, as he realized again that *The Great Gatsby* was a good novel, a worthwhile book on which he had spent his entire skill and experience as a writer. He had let Mamie Simon and Michael Fell obscure that fact, but as he walked along Ridge Street his fury grew, and so did his determination. When he reached the Springfield Manor, he promised himself that he would not give up so easily, that they could deny him no longer.

It was easy to make the vow; it was much more difficult to keep it. Fitzgerald sat in the hotel lobby and wondered what he should do next. He had gotten nowhere in person. Perhaps the right thing would be to contact Scribner's salesman in the area; evidently the salesman had more influence than a mere author. Fitzgerald discarded that idea. He wanted *Gatsby* to succeed on its own merits, not because a salesman who had never read the book had persuaded a lot of bookstore managers to buy it. He wished that Zelda were with him; he needed advice.

After dinner he retired to his room and tried to work. He fiddled with a half-finished short story, a piece whose premise had excited him a few weeks earlier, when the inspiration had struck him. He had been shaving, and suddenly the outline of a sad and ironic story occurred to him in its entirety, plot and characters and mood and everything. He had run to his notebook, the shaving soap drying forgotten on his face, and scribbled his idea quickly, intending to write the story as soon as he finished some work for the *Saturday Evening Post*. Now, with nothing but leisure and very little to distract him in Springfield, he discovered that he could not regain that initial flush of excitement. The story that had at first seemed so complete and balanced now eluded him. What had he intended to do with it? He couldn't even remember how the damn thing was supposed to end. His entry in the notebook read "story about beautiful woman taking over husband's career when he's hospitalized. He saves her." He couldn't recall what the point of the story was; as he read the few pages he had written, the woman seemed like a bubble-brained fool and the man was a lovesick sap. Fitzgerald didn't like either of them. He crumpled up the pages and threw them in the wastebasket. He didn't even bother to search for salvageable images or bits of conversation; that would require reading through it one more time, and he couldn't bring himself to do it.

He was famous for his facility in turning out short stories. The novels sometimes fought him as he struggled to comprehend their internal connections and complications, but the short pieces flowed from his hand as freely as the martinis at his Long Island home. He could hit on a new story idea, sketch it out, write the first draft, edit it, and turn out the final, publishable copy all within a few hours. He rarely suffered any

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kind of block when he was working on a short story. To Fitzgerald it was like telling a joke at a party; the story was all of a piece, each of its various elements implicit in the original conception.

It wasn't that the story had grown stale; it had rested in his notebook only a matter of weeks. It wasn't that the idea had been poor in the first place; he recalled his enthusiasm as he rushed to enter it in the idea file. It was that somehow he had lost some of the vital components. There was nothing to be done about it now. He scowled and paged through his notebook, looking for another story to work on.

He chose one of his favorite recent inspirations, a funny little account of three Yale men, a chorus girl, and a misunderstanding over an invitation. He had no difficulty remembering all the amusing lines of dialogue as he had heard them in his mind. The characters were easy enough to draw; he had been writing about these same people since his college days. Yet when he began to write, he discovered that he couldn't capture the story on paper. He was writing listless prose. He was aiming at a quick, light story and he was turning out such dull copy that he toyed with the idea of killing the Yale men in a terrible traffic accident, leaving the chorine and the reader to ponder the vagaries of the universe.

"Cripes," thought Fitzgerald, "I don't write this kind of stuff. What's going on here?" He tore the story into quarters, and it followed the other into the wastebasket. In the next hour he tried three other story ideas, and each of them was so dull or stupid or contrived that he wondered if his talent had left him suddenly and forever, without warning, like a case of three-day measles. Maybe he would have to get a job in a shoestore or something. Maybe he had become an overnight failure, a former author, fit now only for selling apples or lecturing at girls' colleges.

Finally, furious, Fitzgerald ripped the last sheet of paper from his typewriter. He had any number of excuses: the trip to Springfield had drained his creative powers; the interviews with Mamie Simon and Michael Fell had built a barricade that he had yet to overcome; his thoughts were back home on Long Island, instead of on the story he wished to write. He could have gone on, but these alibis were sufficient. He admitted to himself that he could do very little acceptable work in the state he was in, and some means of relaxation was advisable. There was a bottle of gin in his valise, and it called to him. He tried to resist, knowing that while alcohol is often the friend of inspiration, it is the enemy of good narrative. "But I don't want to work, anyway," he argued. "It would be good for me to take a little time off." So Fitzgerald crossed the room and opened the valise. The bottle of gin glinted in the lamplight, friendly and inviting. Hesitatingly, he opened it and promised that he would not finish the bottle that same evening.

When he had drained two-thirds of the gin, he began to feel sleepy. It had been a long and emotionally taxing day. He walked unsteadily to the bed and collapsed heavily on the covers, still clutching the sloshing bottle of liquor. Somewhere outside the hotel, a steeple clock tolled the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hour. It was one o'clock in the morning. To Fitzgerald, it was still early evening. Nevertheless, his limbs ached, his eyes were unaccountably heavy, and nothing in the world seemed more wonderful to him than a short, warm nap. Unaware, he dropped the bottle to the floor, where the gin soaked into the worn, thin carpet. All was quiet except for the cries of the nighthawks outside. Fitzgerald's breathing slowed and became more regular. He was unconscious.

It was a restless sleep, filled with nightmares. He awoke once, crying out for a puppy that he hadn't thought about since he had been nine years old. He let his head drop back to the pillow. His temples throbbed. He dropped his right hand blindly over the edge of the bed, searching for the gin bottle, but he couldn't find it. He grumbled and tossed and rolled over on his left side. Again his eyelids slipped down, and he found himself in another nightmare. Giant copy editors from another world had seized control of his next novel and were incorporating all sorts of unearthly prose, and he was helpless to stop them. He moaned in his sleep. At last, when one of the monsters replaced the main character entirely with a large collie dog, Fitzgerald awoke with a hoarse cry. His heart was beating fast and loud, and his throat was dry. He needed a drink, but all the liquor he had brought with him now stained the threadbare carpet of the Springfield Manor. He had often pictured moments like this before; helpless, alone, repentant, cut off from all sources of gin; those moments always came at three o'clock in the morning, when for a quarter of an hour he could believe in God. He tried to compose himself again for sleep, but it was impossible. He knew that he would lie awake on the lumpy bed until dawn, and then he would rise and dress and slink away from Springfield in defeat, back to his secure palace on Long Island.

The minutes passed slowly. He watched the minute hand of his wristwatch linger between the six and the seven, between the seven and the eight. It was fighting gravity, he knew. He tried to force his mind to consider pleasant thoughts, plans for new stories, new novels, perhaps a theater piece or two. Yet his inspiration still deserted him. He wondered what he had formerly written about: who had those people been? What had been their problems? What made them funny or sad? It was all so empty to him now.

About four thirty, almost two hours before dawn, supernatural events began to occur. Fitzgerald didn't have much patience with the supernatural but, all alone in the hotel, he discovered that he was a captive audience. At first there were sounds. Loud moans, like a suffering patient on the verge of death, or a murderer who at last clearly realizes the horror of his crimes. The noises didn't seem to be coming from any particular place; they were all around, behind him, beyond the windows, from the direction of the closed door, beneath his bed. "Anxiety," thought Fitzgerald; he had experienced such nervousness before. "I'll put it all out of my mind and try to get back to sleep." He turned his pillow over and pounded it, untangled his feet from the covers, and lay back down with his thoughts concentrating on how happy he would be to get home.

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The noises didn't go away. If anything, they grew louder. At one moment they sounded like the rising and falling of a hurricane's wind. At another time they resembled the awful grating of an out-of-tune carrousel. At last, it was too obvious to ignore. Fitzgerald lowered his feet out of the bed and put on his slippers. He began a slow, careful search through the hotel room. He found nothing. At last, fearful, he let himself drop into one of the room's plush chairs. He glanced from left to right, expecting to see the cause of his sleep's disruption. The moon beamed brightly through the white lace curtains; there wasn't a cloud in the sky. Everything outside was peaceful. For a moment, the noises disappeared. Fitzgerald considered calling the desk in the lobby and complaining, but now there was nothing to complain about. He felt a sick tightening in his stomach. As an author, he knew instinctively that the business was not over yet, not by any means. There was nothing to do but wait.

It did not take long. The white lace curtains, as pale as starlight, began to billow into the room, although there wasn't a hint of breeze. Fitzgerald found that he couldn't take his eyes from the curtains. They appeared to beckon to him. Then, as the curtains took on forms more familiar and tantalizing, there came a sudden slow rumble of thunder. The thunder spoke to him, saying "Behold!" Fitzgerald was definitely upset now. He realized that the curtains had formed the shape of a human body in exquisite detail, and that the ghostlike presence did not flutter on the wind but remained in the room, just within the window. It gazed at him dolefully.

"Touch me, for I am real," said the curtain.

"No, thank you," said Fitzgerald from his chair. "Quite a few other people of my acquaintance claim to be real as well, and I habitually keep my hands to myself. Do, however, make yourself comfortable."

"Comfortable?" cried the ghost in a mocking voice. Its form was recognizable to Fitzgerald: the suit, the shirt and collar, the tie, the man's hat. Perhaps the author was only fatigued, or else he was truly asleep and dreaming; but the curtain-ghost seemed to Fitzgerald to look just like himself. He was meeting his own spirit. It was more unnerving than meeting someone else's. The ghost trailed a long chain that was clasped about its middle. It was endless, it seemed, and coiled about the wraith's body from its neck down to its ankles; the chain was connected to many odd things: notebooks, typewriters, galley sheets, magazines, books, and cocktail glasses all forged from heavy steel. The lace curtain rippled and puckered, but the ghost's face never lost its utterly mournful aspect. Fitzgerald could see the thing as plain as cards on the table; he could feel the piteous gaze of the curtain's eyes upon him; he could trace the folds of the curtain as it wrapped about the ghost's head, like a bandage; he could discern a hundred different details, yet the whole experience was too impossible, and he searched for a more palpable explanation.

"You're not there!" said Fitzgerald. "It's just a trick of the moonlight and the breeze. But if you are here, what do you want?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Much!" cried the ghost.

Fitzgerald shivered. Tricks of moonlight do not often answer such questions. "Who are you?" he asked tremulously.

"Do you not know me? I am yourself. I am the chained and bound spirit of your own creativity. As you see, you have imprisoned me yourself."

"Please," said Fitzgerald, remembering his manners, "do sit down."

"You don't believe in me," said the ghost.

"No," said Fitzgerald, "I don't."

"Why do you doubt your eyes and your ears?"

"Because I dream like this all the time," said the author. "That's part of being a writer. My imagination works all the day while I'm awake, but does not murmur off into silence when I go to bed to take my rest. You are merely the hint of a story I haven't yet realized, or the lingering remnant of something I have already written and forgotten. Or else you are just the effect of one too many gimlets."

The ghost raised a terrible cry at these words, shaking its chain and rattling its accoutrements with so fierce and horrifying a clamor that Fitzgerald grabbed the arms of his chair and forced himself to remain where he was. He wanted desperately to flee this room, to seek the company of more rational men. Yet as great as was his fear, so much greater did it become when the ghost removed the bandage from its head, and the parts of its hideous face loosed themselves one from another, to lie about broken and disfigured.

"Please!" cried Fitzgerald. "Why have you come to me?"

The curtain slowly raised one immaterial arm and pointed. "Living man," it said in a deep, rumbling voice, "you must believe in me."

"Whatever you say," said Fitzgerald. "But why do you trouble me? Surely there are lesser writers around who might benefit from such a revelation."

"I come to you, Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, because I *am* you."

"And what is the significance of your chains?"

"I bear the bonds we forged together. We made it link by link, and yard by yard."

Fitzgerald trembled. "Like Marley's ghost," he murmured.

"Yes, a lot like Marley's ghost," said the phantom. "Do you not know that any man at work in his particular field, whatever it might be, will find his earthly life too short? That at the end, no quantity of regret will counterweigh the misused opportunities of one's life?"

"You don't have to talk to me about misused opportunities," said Fitzgerald with a little bitterness. "But I thought I was doing rather well, all things considered."

"Indeed, so it appears," said the spirit. "You are the toast of the literary crowd. In your home, luxury sits cheek by jowl with luxury. You have all the appurtenances of success: the clothing, the automobiles, the food and drink of the rich. Yet, then, why am I—why are *you* so bound and captive by this chain of unfulfilled promise?"

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fitzgerald was a trifle annoyed. "Don't ask me," he said. "Maybe you *enjoy* being chained up. I try to avoid making value judgments about people like that."

The ghost wrung its curtain hands. "Hear me! My time with you is nearly gone. I am here tonight to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping this fate. I have come to make this visit to offer you that hope, Scott."

"You are my creativity," said Fitzgerald. "You've always done right by me in the past. I'll listen. What must I do?"

"Do you not see it for yourself?" said the curtain, moaning. "What did T. S. Eliot say in his letter?"

"He said *Gatsby* is the first step American fiction has taken since Henry James."

"There," said the ghost. "See? Didn't that Chicago newspaper say that you had given a profound definition to the shifting of American ideals?"

"Yes, but I never understood what that meant."

The curtain looked impatiently up at the ceiling, as if a supply of strength could be expected from that direction. "It means, old chap, that America has turned its madly whirling eyes to you for leadership. It means that you are setting the tone and the style of this decade. You have been given a kind of power that is given to very few writers. You must awaken to this power, and use it to your advantage."

"I still don't understand," said Fitzgerald.

There came a long sigh from the curtain. "Didn't the New York *Herald* congratulate you on the invention of a new set of literary preoccupations? Didn't the San Francisco *Chronicle* say that it was as if you had written the script for the grand production of the Jazz Age? Didn't the *Times* say that you hadn't so much *captured* the mood and inclinations of our time, as *created* them?"

"So?"

"So you are not a reporter, in the way that Ernest is. You are the source of the trends other writers can only describe."

Fitzgerald smiled in the darkness. "I like that," he said.

"Sure," said the phantom, "but you haven't yet realized the full implications of such an ability."

"What do you mean?"

"Look to me no more; and look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us!" Fitzgerald recognized that these were the very words that Marley's ghost had spoken before disappearing from Scrooge's chamber; and, as he watched, his own spectral visitor began to vanish. From the open window came the sounds of discontent, as if a crowd below were joining the curtained ghost in its dire yet curiously hopeful pronouncements. Fitzgerald heard self-accusing wailings; certain members of the crowd were as frustrated and angry as himself, but unable to remedy the situation. He could take action, or he could join the chorus of lamentations. The choice was entirely his own.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He closed the window and shook the now inanimate curtain. Now, in the quiet of the night, there were no signs of the spirit. All was peaceful again. Fitzgerald's mouth was dry, and he wished that he hadn't spilled the rest of the gin. He glanced around the shadowy hotel room and thought of the ghost's words. "Humbug!" he said, smiling a little; he didn't want to admit that he was afraid. He went straight to bed, and fell asleep upon the instant.

When Fitzgerald awoke, there was the germ of an idea in his mind. He looked quickly at the curtain, but it hung lifelessly from the rod. There was a faint alcoholic reek in the air, but otherwise there was nothing to indicate that the events of the night before had been anything other than a vivid dream. The author went to the window and opened it, and took a few deep breaths of the fresh air. He wanted to get to work.

He dressed himself in a maroon robe and worn felt slippers. He called down to the front desk to have a bottle of gin, a bottle of tonic water, and some limes sent up. Because of Prohibition, these drinks would be expensive. He shrugged; he had more important things to worry about.

He rolled a clean sheet of paper into his typewriter, ignoring the crumpled-up, stillborn stories of the afternoon before. "The Dolphin Bookshop," he typed, "is a pleasant little store situated on the corner of Lake Street and West 28th."

Fitzgerald stared at the sentence for a moment. "So I'm writing the script, huh?" he thought. He typed some more. "The business is owned and operated by a young couple, George and Tessie Brown, who allow their customers to browse comfortably among the current volumes, and are knowledgeable and courteous to every person who comes into the shop. They are eager to be of help, and they consider it their privilege to keep in stock all the titles of F. Scott Fitzgerald, who was born and grew up in Springfield. Whenever he visits his home town, the Browns treat him like a returning hero."

The paragraph made Fitzgerald smile; how he wished it were true. "I'm creating the inclinations, am I?" he thought. He began another paragraph. "At the offices of the Springfield *Register-Pistareen,* Carter M. Puurser, Princeton '12, is readying this week's book review column for the paper's supplement, *Springfield-Match.* The column is devoted to former Springfield resident F. Scott Fitzgerald's newest literary triumph, *The Great Gatsby*. Puurser, who with the novelist shares a love of Old Nassau, implores his readers to purchase *Gatsby* and savor its rich characterization, its celebration of America as we know it today, and its warning of where that same American spirit might find itself tomorrow. It will be a long while before anyone writes a novel to top *The Great Gatsby,* at least in the eyes of the faithful Springfield readership."

Although he had written less than a page, Fitzgerald felt exhausted. He let out his breath in a melancholy sigh and pushed his chair back from the desk. He read the paragraphs again, shaking his head. "This is just wish-fulfillment," he thought. If the ghostly curtain of the night

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

before had been real—and could be trusted—perhaps there *was* something magic about his writing. In the harsh light of day, however, his doubts grew. He went into the bathroom and showered, shaved, and brushed his teeth. He dressed, unwrapping a fresh shirt and choosing a modest blue tie. He picked up the telephone and called the front desk. "I'll need a cab," he said. "I'll be right down."

His first destination was Lake Street and West 28th. He paid the cabdriver and approached the bookstore. He was startled to see a small mountain of *Gatsbys* piled up in the display window, and a hand-lettered sign, reading: *Springfield's own F. Scott Fitzgerald, the brightest literary light in America!* It was more than he expected; it was even more than he had hoped for. He grasped the doorknob with a sweating hand and went in.

A young man came toward him. Without the need for introduction, Fitzgerald knew immediately that this was George Brown, proprietor of the Dolphin Bookshop. Michael Fell was no more. "May I help you?" asked Brown.

Fitzgerald didn't know what to say. Yesterday, George Brown had not even existed. "I'm—"

"You're Mr. *Fitzgerald,* aren't you!" said Brown.

"Yes, I am."

"Just a moment, Mr. Fitzgerald. This is truly an honor. Please let me get my wife; she'd love to meet you." Brown hurried away toward the back of the store.

Fitzgerald nodded; this was more like it. It wasn't that he wanted to have shopkeepers fawning over him, but he desperately needed to be accepted here, in his birthplace. How often had he been reminded of his failure here? Whenever he wrote a check, or made reservations at a restaurant, or took a room at a hotel, and his name wasn't recognized. No one in Springfield had ever stopped him and said, "Aren't you the author of 'A Diamond As Big As The Ritz'?" All that was going to change, though. F. Scott Fitzgerald was writing the script now, and he was going to make a few pertinent revisions in the scheme of things. He began to relax; he even began to enjoy it a little.

"Mr. Fitzgerald?" said Brown, leading his short, slight, pretty wife by one hand. "This is Tessie. She's read every single thing you've ever published."

The young woman blushed. "I wish I had your bibliography, Mr. Fitzgerald. I'd just hate to think that I've missed a short story somewhere."

"I'm very grateful for your loyalty," said Fitzgerald, shaking her hand.

"Oh, everyone in town follows your progress," she said. "We all think it's so grand."

"Would you mind signing the copies of your books?" asked Brown.

"Not at all," said Fitzgerald, smiling. He reached inside his suit coat and took out an expensive fountain pen; Zelda had bought it at Tiffany's, just for her husband to use to sign autographs. The Dolphin Bookshop

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had so many copies of *Gatsby,* and so many copies of his earlier books, that he didn't get out of the store until nearly two o'clock. George and Tessie Brown were unwilling to let him escape; but Fitzgerald said he had another appointment, at the newspaper. At last they let him call a cab.

During the ride to the *Register-Pistareen's* offices the warm glow faded, until Fitzgerald was left with a hard knot of apprehension in his stomach. One reptilian look, one syllable in Mamie Simon's grackle voice would destroy him. Despite his success at the bookstore, Mamie Simon was still the greatest threat to his happiness. Fitzgerald felt as he had on very few previous occasions: here, now, his life hung in some sort of balance. He would emerge from this last confrontation elated, renewed, and filled with great expectations or he would come out crushed in final defeat. It took a certain amount of courage to send the cab away and climb the steps.

The secretary sat at her battered desk, reading Sinclair Lewis' *Arrowsmith.* That was a good sign, Fitzgerald thought. At least she wasn't engrossed in some privately printed collection of household hints. "I would like to see Mamie Simon," he said.

"Who?" said the secretary.

"My name is Scott Fitzgerald. I was here yesterday."

"I remember," said the woman, "but whom did you wish to see?"

"Mamie Simon."

"Nobody here by that name, sir."

Fitzgerald felt a great joy grow in him. "Your book review editor—"

"Oh, you mean Mr. Puurser. He's not here now. Would you like me to take a message? He could call you later this afternoon."

"That won't be necessary; it wasn't anything important. Thank you very much."

"You're welcome. I really enjoyed *The Great Gatsby,* Mr. Fitzgerald."

He was startled. "Why, thank you. I'm glad you liked it."

The secretary smiled shyly. "I'm looking forward to your next book."

"So am I," said Fitzgerald. He almost soared out of the building, inflated nearly to bursting with happiness.

The happiness, unfortunately, was not to last. Although he felt as Scrooge felt at the end of *A Christmas Carol,* Fitzgerald had overlooked something small and sad and vital. He ought to have assured his success in the same way he triumphed over his adversaries in Springfield. Rather, he was lulled by the sudden acceptance he had won in his hometown, and by the continued wonderful reviews for *The Great Gatsby.* He felt that he was Heaven's darling and, for a time, he was; but such moments cannot last forever, and even as Fitzgerald began to celebrate his victory, he began to lose ground. Across America, despite the reviews, the readers were not buying *Gatsby.* As quickly as it had come, as briefly as he had prospered, Fitzgerald's tenure as scriptwriter for the Twenties ended. No longer creating the attitudes of his contemporaries, he slowly

LICENSED TO UNT ONLY
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lost confidence, and it showed in his work. He tried writing things like "Once more on the top of the heap, F. Scott Fitzgerald laughs in the faces of those who claimed he has nothing new to show them." It didn't work; it was too late.

"There's nothing as fleeting as fame," Sheilah Graham told him on one drunken, rainy afternoon.

"Fleeting," agreed Fitzgerald bitterly. "I thought that meant years. I didn't know it meant *minutes*."

But that is the very end of his story. Fitzgerald guessed nothing of that when he packed his suitcase in the room at the Springfield Manor. That was a time of power and rejoicing, and he looked forward eagerly to returning to Long Island, to his great house and his beautiful family, to the company of his close friends and the warmth of adulation. In 1925, that was the theme of Fitzgerald's life, the way we should remember him: like Gatsby in more ways than one—rich, generous, and yearning. He became, in the end, even more his own character. He truly became Jay Gatsby, staring across the water at the green light, the emblem of the genuine and lasting bliss that forever eluded him.

All parties end, and all songs fade at last into silence; but Fitzgerald had something to cling to during his slow decline. He knew that whatever happened to him, however his fortunes fell, he was forever beloved in Springfield. At least in Springfield. ●

MARTIN GARDNER (From page 51)

SECOND SOLUTION TO AROUND THE SOLAR SYSTEM

Figure 3 shows how the dime can tour the solar system in just four moves. Who said the coin couldn't slide outside the matrix?

And now would you believe it if I tell you this task can be accomplished in just *three* moves? If the aha! doesn't hit you, page 137 will show how it's done.

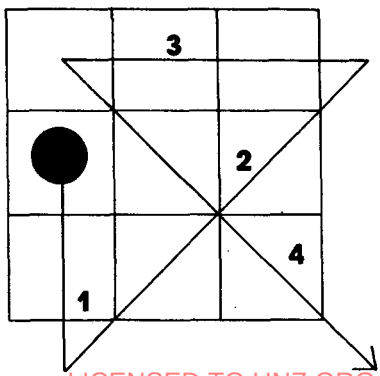


Figure 3

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

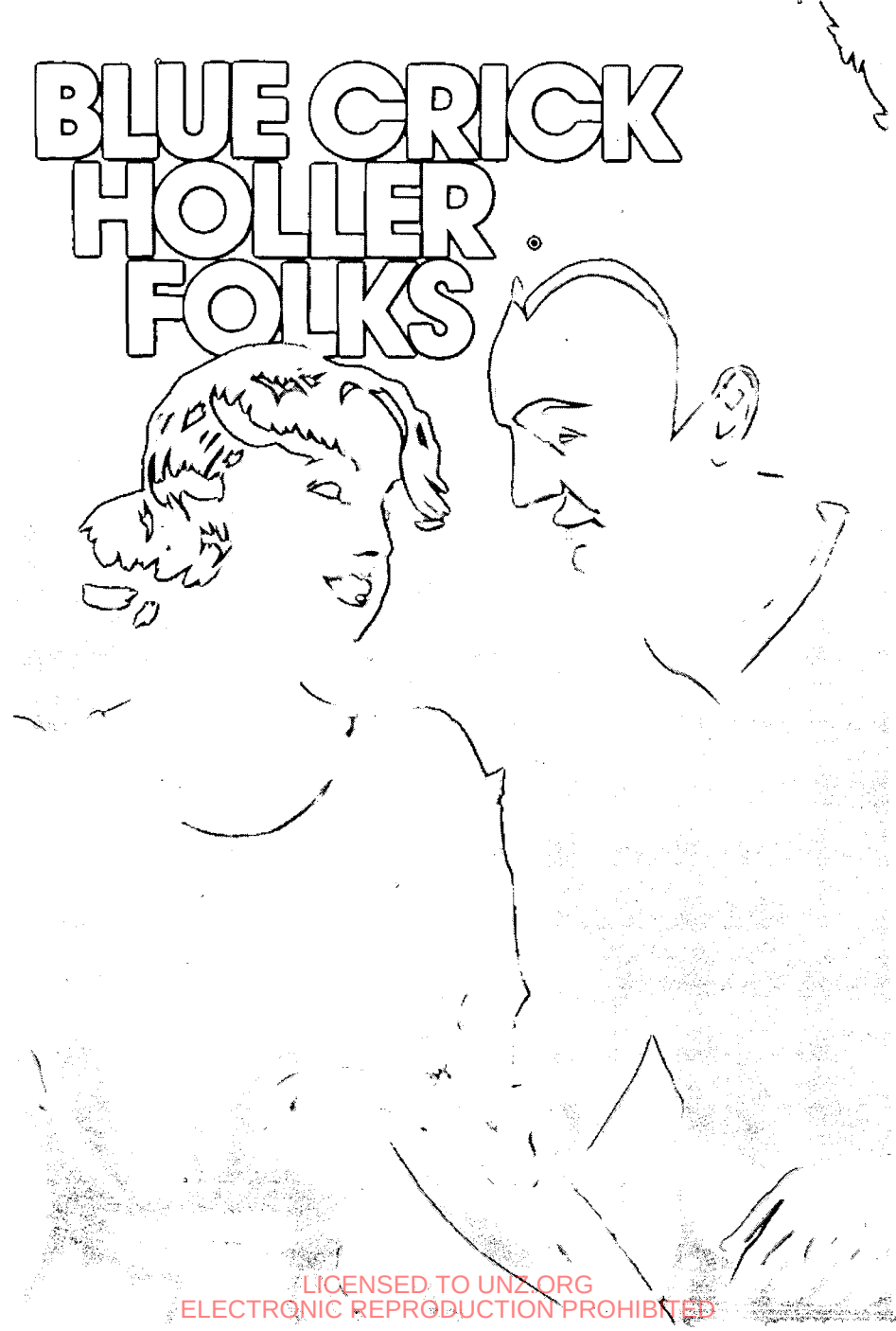
THE DREAMING MACHINE ACQUIRES ARMS

To turn thought
into touch, to caress
what it dreams of: these arms
with well-articulated fingers,
more joints than humans have
for picking, for probing,
for embracing the smallest
parts of the world. It acquires
pseudo-nerves to feel
the heat, the cold,
the pain when another
pulls back, the sense
of things close by,
and those farther
than it might imagine.

—Steve Rasnic Tem

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BLUE CRICK HOLLER FOLKS

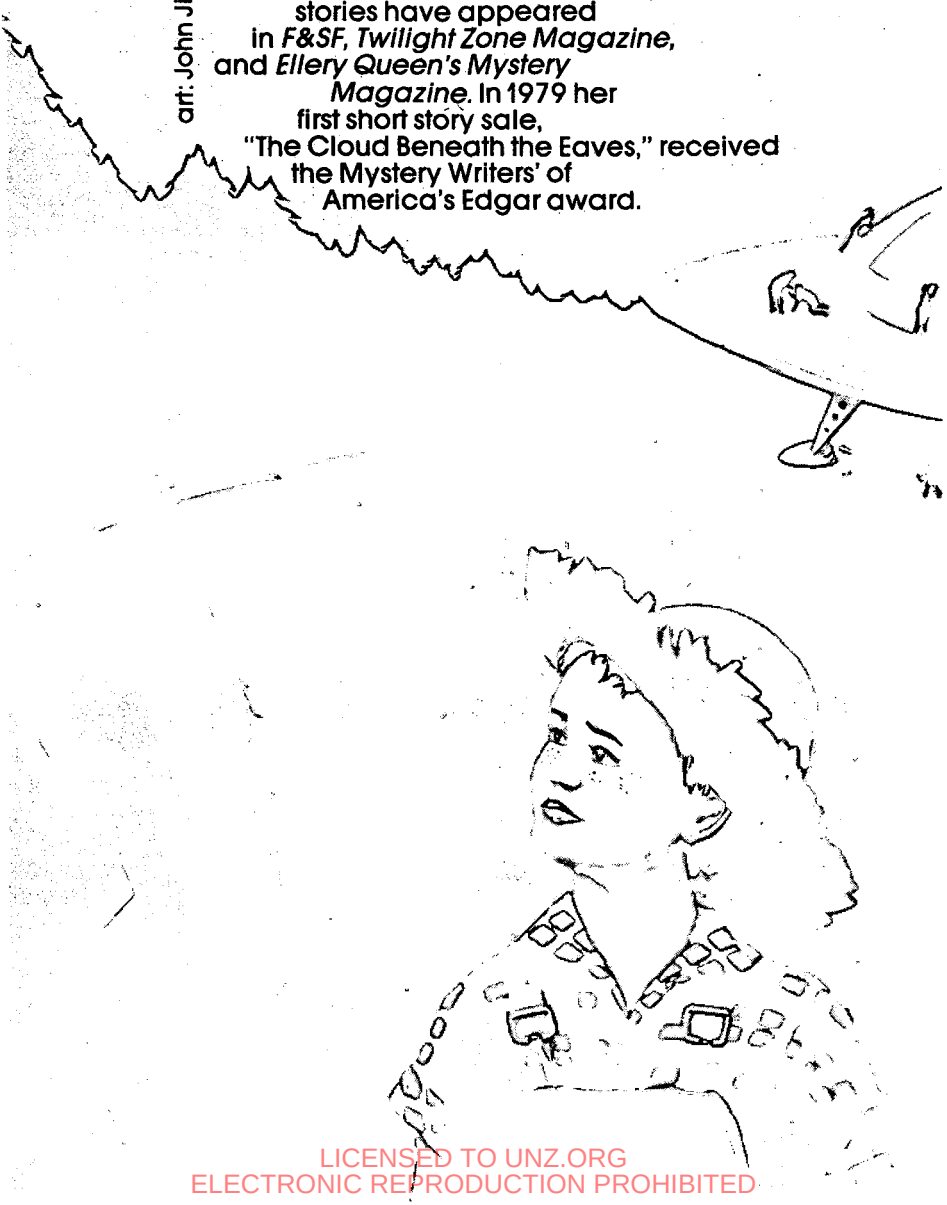


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by Barbara Owens

art: John Jinks

A Californian, Barbara Owens' stories have appeared in *F&SF*, *Twilight Zone Magazine*, and *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. In 1979 her first short story sale, "The Cloud Beneath the Eaves," received the Mystery Writers' of America's Edgar award.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As I remember, I was twelve and getting long in the britches the summer they came. Late at night it was, over top of that ridge yonder. Not making a sound, no lights, just this great big shadow all of a sudden taking up the sky. I was out front smoking some tobacco I'd stole from Daddy, and I tell you, it like to scared me senseless. I didn't catch the size or shape of it then, but I knew it was bigger than me or anyone else in the holler had ever seen, and I come close to letting out a yell, but the truth of it is I was just too plain scared to move.

Then—just like that it was gone. Somewhere down in the timber on the other side of the crick. I heard big limbs fall and birds squawk, then nothing, just like it hadn't happened. All there was was me out front of the house with a bellyful of swallowed smoke and a sure notion I was going to puke right in the middle of Mama's little patch of marigolds.

I must of shook for about an hour after, but by morning I had myself almost turned around enough to believe I hadn't seen it. No one else had, it appeared, and I was just starting to feel good again when Buck and Biggo Lacey come marching up the road with a couple of outsiders square in their sights.

Someone scooted right off for Miss Margaret or Doc Temple. They was the only ones could handle the Lacey boys and, sure enough, as they come closer we could all hear Buck begging Biggo to let him shoot 'em both.

Everyone stopped in the road outside the general store—Laceys and the outsiders on one side, all us folks from town on the other. I shoved right up front where I could see. We'd had a few outsiders in town before, mostly hunters or lost folks trying to find their way out again. Never did stay long. They was usually convinced soon enough they wasn't wanted; besides, there was always Buck and Biggo. All of us had heard stories about folks stumbling into the holler, meeting up with the boys or some of their kin, and never seeing the light of day again. I had a feeling these two had to do with what I'd seen the night before, and I wanted a good look before they got run out of town or shot.

Nobody said nothing. We all looked at the outsiders and they looked back. They seemed pretty much same as us except they didn't have whiskers and their clothes was funny—all of one piece and some kind of shiny dark material. They had their hands behind their heads and Buck was sort of jigging around, hiking his shotgun from one arm to the other—I could tell he was just itching to let go.

Doc and Miss Margaret both come on the run; Miss Margaret was in such a hurry her sunbonnet had fell off and hung down her back. She elbowed right up next to me and looked at Buck Lacey doing his little dance in the road.

"Put that down, Buck Lacey. Down, I say!"

I never heard of nobody going crossways of Miss Margaret. Everyone in the holler had gone to school to her at one time or another, and she'd tanned us all at least once. Nowhere near as big as me, face all wrinkled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and scrunched like one of them dried apple dolls, she put the fear in us, and when she told mean-tempered Buck Lacey to put his shotgun down, he put it down.

"Now, what's all the fuss? Doc, you here?"

"Here."

Doc shouldered up alongside, and while they took their first look at the outsiders, the rest of us had another.

"Found 'em snoopin in the timber, Miss Margaret," Biggo spoke up. "Huntin' for the still. Buck here wanted to kill 'em right off, but I figured there's something you and Doc ought to know first."

Miss Margaret eyed the outsiders for a long while. They hadn't moved since the Laceys stopped them in the road. I couldn't tell if they were scared, but it seemed to me they looked back as though they'd never seen anything like us before.

"Doc?" Miss Margaret said.

Doc cleared his throat. "Well, I don't know, boys," he said in his quiet way. "Reckon you might let them put down their hands? They ain't going anywhere."

Buck's face fell in like he was going to cry. "They was huntin' for our still!"

Miss Margaret sighed. "How many times I told you there hasn't been a revenue agent in these parts for years? Shoot, nobody *cares* anymore if you're making corn. Most folks out there don't even recollect we're here! Now, let these poor souls put their hands down and tell us what you come for."

Everyone watched the outsiders' arms go down slowlike to their sides. They kept still, but I seen their eyes going from one face to the other, like they was measuring us for something.

"Well?" Miss Margaret said.

Biggo scuffed his bare feet in the road. "Well, it's what they come in. Something funny-like. Makes me right nervous, Miss Margaret. Maybe you and Doc oughta see it before we run 'em off."

"Don't want to run 'em off," Buck Lacey said. "Want to shoot 'em. Right quick."

"Hold on," Doc said. "Why don't we let these fellers have a say? Can't see that'll cause no harm."

"That's right." Miss Margaret grinned up at Doc and he grinned back.

They was a pair, those two. The stories go that a long time ago Doc was an outsider himself, come into town one day when my daddy was a boy. Running from the law, some say, and just a hair away from being another notch on old man Lacey's shotgun stock when Miss Margaret got word he was a reading man. There wasn't nothing ever pleasured Miss Margaret more than a body who read books.

"That's right," she said again. "Let's hear them speak their piece."

And she marched right up to the outsiders and looked them smack in the eye.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How do," she said, and stuck out her hand.

After a minute one of the men reached out to touch it, and Miss Margaret grabbed his hand and shook it up and down. The other one watched, and when Miss Margaret turned on him he stuck his hand out quick and she shook it, too. The outsiders looked at one another, then back at us; the folks from town was moving, closing up the gap.

"I'm Miss Margaret Latimore and this here's Doc Temple. Don't mind our manners. We don't see many folks from the outside around here and we like that just fine. Now, you tell us what you're doin' in the holler and you better make it quick."

"In the—holler?" the big outsider said. His voice was soft and he talked funny—his lips scarce moved at all.

"Blue Crick Holler. You lost, that what it is?"

The outsider looked puzzled. "Yes. No, not exactly. Am I correct—excuse me, please."

He reached inside the front of his suit and Buck Lacey went stiff, but the outsider pulled out a piece of paper and the two men squinted at it in the sun.

"What's that? A map?" Miss Margaret said.

"Yes. Please, there's some confusion. We had, ah—" he looked us all over careful "—engine problems and needed a place to make repairs." He frowned down at the map. "We were so careful. This is the Blue Creek area in the Cumberland mountain range, yes?"

"I told you, didn't I? Blue Crick Holler," Miss Margaret said. It looked like her patience was wearing out.

The outsider looked more puzzled. "C-R-E-E-K?"

"Crick! Crick! What are you, some kind of fool?"

Somewhere in the crowd Chug Adamstock belched. Chug was the best around in belching. Miss Margaret turned around and shivered him with a look.

"I say let Buck shoot 'em," Chug said, and several folks nodded.

"Crick," the outsider said, still studying over his map. "Blue Crick. I'm so sorry. According to this, there should be no habitation. We were meticulous in selecting the most isolated facet of the—ah, where we could complete repairs without being detected."

"I didn't understand a blessed thing he said," someone said in the crowd.

"I'm so sorry," the outsider said.

Things was getting restless. I pushed up close while I still had the chance. I crowded Miss Margaret and she turned around and give me a shove.

"Get back, Grady Pike. All of you, get back. What you got, a big truck or something over there? How long you reckon it'll take to fix? Come on, speak up, we haven't got all day."

The outsiders looked at each other again. Seemed to me like they was almost talking with their eyes. The bigger one nodded, like the two of them had settled on something without saying a word.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes, a big truck," he told Miss Margaret. "I promise we won't disturb you if you'll allow us to make repairs."

Miss Margaret's cheeks was turning red. "How long, I say? I can't hold these folks back much longer. Reckon you can do it today? Or is it going to take a spell?"

Both outsiders looked at us again. "I'm afraid it's going to—take a spell," the big one said.

"That's it!" someone bawled. "Take 'em out and shoot 'em; Buck."

Before I knew what was going on, both them outsiders had their hands raised up in the air, like Daddy does when he gets too much corn and starts to preach his hellfire sermons. I swear everything stopped—the air, birds, everything. Folks said after that it felt like their whole heads filled up with soft down feathers, nice and peaceful as can be. That's pretty much the way it felt to me, too. Next thing I know, Miss Margaret's saying, not sassy like usual, "Well, I don't see any reason why not. Take as long as you please, even if it is a spell."

Buck Lacey reared up behind the outsiders, his mouth hanging open like he couldn't believe what Miss Margaret had said.

"What?" he sang out. His face turned purple and he swung his shotgun up. "I be damned if—"

The outsiders turned around and looked at him, and in a minute Buck said, sweet as sorghum, "Shoot, that sounds all right to me."

All of a sudden them fellers seemed real nice, like folks, and before I could get my head clear, we was all marching down the road and wading across the crick because the big outsider had said we could see their truck.

Seemed like a picnic, all the folks from town following them fellers through the woods, laughing and talking as big as you please. Mama showed up from somewhere; I looked up and seen her beside me, eyes big and blue, yellow hair shiny in the sun.

"Ain't this fun, Grady?" she said. "Those fellers sure seem grand."

A little shiver tickled the back of my neck. "Where's Daddy? He ain't—"

"It's all right. He's sleepin' it off out back of the house."

We walked for quite a spell, then we started coming to places where big limbs had fell, or it looked like they'd broke right off the trees. Sometimes the whole tops had tore off, and I got a funny quiver in my belly. Nobody else seemed to fix on it, but it seemed like I almost remembered something. Then the big feller turned around and seen me squinching up at the trees and the next minute whatever it was was gone and we was at the place where the big truck was, and everybody stepped right up to it and stared.

I'd never seen anything like it. Of course, I'd never been out of the holler, and neither had anyone else I knew of except Doc and Miss Margaret. Even they was looking at it with their eyes bugged out, and finally Doc said in a funny kind of wheeze, "Boys, that is sure some kind of truck!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It stood up half as high as the trees, and it must've been as big as the general store, the church and the old sawmill all rolled up together. It looked to be made of a kind of shiny tin and it was rounded up on top. I'd seen Wiley Rooder's old pickup, and sometimes one of them big lumber trucks in the distance, but I sure never seen anything that looked like that.

Everybody appeared to be struck dumb. Even Miss Margaret. She kind of worked her jaw a while, and then she said, "Why, that don't look like—"

"It's new," the big outsider said. "Experimental. We were, ah, testing it, you see, when we experienced difficulty." He looked at all of us again and the nice feathers in my head came back. "What we have here is a very large new kind of truck."

"Well, well," Miss Margaret said. She grinned up at him. "It surely is a big'un, all right."

"It's grand!" Mama whispered beside me. "Oh, my, isn't it grand!"

"There are others here," the outsider said. "Please, they'd like to meet you now."

"Others?" Miss Margaret said, but just then a door rolled up in the side of the truck and there was a whole mess more of the outsiders, all dressed in the same dark shiny suits. I figured there must've been at least twenty.

You could've heard a flea sneeze. I sneaked a look at Buck Lacey—he was standing off to one side, leaning on his shotgun. He had a big silly grin on his face and he didn't move a hair.

"Well, my goodness," Miss Margaret said, and the outsiders came on down and stood looking at us like they couldn't believe what they saw.

"Introductions are in order. I apologize for not doing it before. My name is—" I didn't catch what the big outsider said, then the other one said something, then the big outsider called them all out and said their names. There was both men and women, and he finished up with one he called his wife and a little girl one he said was theirs.

Each time he said a name Miss Margaret blinked, and folks began to look at one another and shake their heads.

"Well now," Miss Margaret said when he was done, "I'm sorry, but I couldn't get hold of one of those names. Sounded like you was clearin' your throat or spittin' every time. No mind, we'll get the hang of it. Now, come on and meet our folks."

First thing you know, we was all mixed up together and everyone shaking hands. The outsiders seemed a little rusty, but pretty soon they was shaking as good as anyone and everyone looked like they was having a real fine time.

I guess I shook every one of their hands. They felt a little strange —their skin was cool and smooth-like. Made me think of Miss Margaret's leather parlor sofa, and when you squeezed them a little, they gave. Underneath they felt soft and puffy, like their stuffing was old. They all talked the same funny way, too, without hardly moving their lips at all.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I looked over at Buck. He was shaking and talking away like he did that every day of his life. When I looked back, the big outsider was shaking Mama's hand and she was just staring up at him with her great big eyes. He went on, but in a minute he was back again, and he shook her hand again.

"What a pretty mama you have, young man," he said. Mama never said a word, just went on and on shaking his hand.

Pretty soon someone wanted to take a gander inside the truck, but the big outsider said things was just a mess and we could as soon as they'd straightened up a bit. We stayed around a while, then folks started poking back to town.

"You sure you all don't want to come to supper?" Miss Margaret said. "You're surely welcome."

"Thank you, no. We're very tired and, as you can see, we have much work to do on our—truck."

"Well, come on into town whenever you feel like it," Doc said. "And if we can help out, just let us know. You best get a move on your fixing. Gonna be a bad year for locusts. I figure they're due to hit any day."

"Thank you," the outsider said.

Back in town everyone hung together talking about the nice new folks, how polite they was, and how they had such funny-sounding names. Everyone was in real good spirits. I hated to leave when Mama said it was time for supper.

Daddy was still laid out in the back yard, so it was just the two of us at the table. Neither one of us said much. I was trying to remember something that had scared me the night before, but it wouldn't come. Mama just stared off into space with a funny little smile. Both of us went to bed early. I thought I'd be awake a while, what with so much excitement and all, but I went right off and didn't hear a thing until morning.

Then it was Doc and Miss Margaret what woke me. They was walking by out front, and as soon as I seen where they was heading, I lit out after them. It was right early—the sun hadn't even started chasing shadows out of the holler—but the outsiders was all up and outside the truck when we got there.

"I hope this'll set right with you," Miss Margaret started right off, "but we're having a time with your names. You seem to get the hang of ours all right, but yours is giving us all fits. Would it be all right if we give you some others to call by while you're here, just so we don't keep on hollering 'hey'?"

The big outsider thought a minute and said that would be fine.

"Good," Miss Margaret said. "Me and Doc been up half the night coming up with some. We figured we've used up most of the ones here in the holler—we got all kinds of Jims, Bobs, Bills and Ferns and Sues. So we went through our books." She squinched up at him. "You a reading man, by any chance?"

"When I have the time I like to read," the big outsider said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Miss Margaret grinned so wide all her false teeth showed. "I knew it! I had a notion about you. Well, we wrote down some names on these slips of paper. You look 'em over and pick what strikes you. Except for your little girl here—I got one special for her."

She handed out the little pieces of paper and the outsiders passed them around, talking soft to one another. It seemed to me a couple of them laughed, but it was hard to tell because they were so close-mouthed all the time. Miss Margaret helped some of them on how to say the names. Finally everyone seemed satisfied. The big one's wife took Cleopatra, and kept saying it over and over like she liked the sound. The man who'd come into town first with the big outsider tried out Ichabod. Every time he said it, he made a funny choking sound.

While everybody was saying the names and getting used to them, the big outsider come up to Miss Margaret, holding the little girl one by the hand.

"Thank you, Miss Margaret. Thank you, Doc. This was very thoughtful of you. There is only one small change." He held out two slips of paper. "Because I am the leader I must have the two-name, so I will take my daughter's special one and she will take mine."

Miss Margaret squinted at the slips of paper. Her face bunched up in a frown.

"Now, you can't rightly do that, you see. This here is a girl's name and—"

"What you mean, leader?" Doc spoke up. "You said you was the leader."

The outsider looked up. "Did I say leader? Of course not. I'm more like the—" he stopped.

"Boss?" I said. He looked down at me and almost smiled.

"Exactly—boss. I'm the boss and so I must have the two-name."

"But, look here," Miss Margaret said, "Hamlet's a fine name. He was a prince, you know, that's a kind of boss. Now, Little Nell—"

The outsider set his jaw. "I must have the two-name," he said, stubborn-like. "My daughter doesn't object. She likes Hamlet. I will be Little Nell."

Doc made a funny sound in his throat and Miss Margaret shot him a look.

"But—" she said.

"Thank you again," the big outsider said. "The names we have chosen will be just fine."

Miss Margaret was licked. She asked the folks again to come to supper, but they said they was very busy and would come at night after their work was done to sit around and make friends.

We started back up the road to town, but pretty soon Doc and Miss Margaret got to laughing so hard about the big outsider calling himself Little Nell that Miss Margaret had to sit down on a stump a while to catch her breath. All of a sudden everyone in the holler seemed to be having one whale of a good time.

Except maybe Daddy. He was finally sober but feeling mean, so Mama

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and I took to the woods for the day to pick berries and stay out of his way. I told her all about the names, but she didn't laugh at Little Nell. She didn't seem to be paying too much attention to me at all.

"I wonder where they come from," she said once, kind of to herself. "A city, I bet. Someplace grand."

She looked so fine, her hair all goldy in the sun. Everyone said Mama was the prettiest thing in the holler. She always made me feel good just to look at her.

That night after supper the folks from the truck came to town, and everyone stood or set around in little bunches talking just like we'd known each other forever. The boss, Little Nell, wasn't there, but I looked up once and thought I seen him standing in the road down by the crick. It was almost dark and I must of been wrong, because when I looked again he wasn't there. In a few minutes Mama come by and told me she was going to take a walk down by the crick to cool off. I thought that was kind of foolish because the mosquitoes was out and she had on her Sunday dress, but I was so set on listening to all the talk I didn't think on it much.

I tried to start up a game with some of the other kids and Hamlet, but she was sticking close to her mama, so pretty soon us kids wore out and went on home to bed. I snuck by Daddy drinking out in the yard. I didn't want to get collared and have to listen to one of his hellfire sermons. Daddy was a fine preacher, filled the church every Sunday, but he couldn't seem to preach unless he was full of corn, and when he was full of that he got mean. Mostly I just tried to stay out of his way and we got along fine.

In a few days everyone was so used to the new folks nobody even stopped to think on how we'd took them in so quick and how they seemed to fit right in. All the folks in town was working away on their gardens and berrying—locusts was coming and we all knew they'd eat everything in sight.

Me and some of the other boys went out to the truck a lot, but mostly just got in the way. Little Nell and the rest of them was working hard—they said they was making progress and ought to be finished before too long. Me and the boys surely wanted to see inside their truck, but our mamas had raised us to always wait until we was asked, so we just hung around hoping they'd ask us, but they was too busy, I guess. Couple of times when we was playing in the woods I thought I seen Mama and Little Nell walking along and talking, but she never mentioned it, so I guessed it must of been somebody else.

Pretty soon the truck folks' shiny clothes started to get tore up from all the work they was doing, so folks from town give them things—a pair of overalls, a print housedress. Before you know it, you had to look close to tell who was who. Little Nell was the only one kept wearing his suit, and I figured it was because he had to—he was boss.

One real hot Sunday afternoon it was too mean to do anything but set

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

around and sweat. Most folks stayed inside where it was cooler, but Daddy was asleep on our sofa, all likkered up and snoring so loud I couldn't think straight, so I went off to see if I could find some of the boys. Mama had gone wading in the crick, but the bugs was too bad down there for me.

Doc and Ichabod was out front of the store, so I set down to visit with them a while. Doc was telling Ichabod some story and Ichabod was just nodding along, his eyes half closed. The heat made me sleepy. I was just starting to doze off when I heard a mean sound and looked up to see a big old black wasp hanging right over top of Doc's white hair. I straightened up real slow.

"Don't move, Doc. There's a wasp getting ready to set down right on your head."

Everybody knows a wasp's sting is about the most painful sting there is, unless maybe it's a bumblebee. Doc went still as a statue, just his eyes rolling from side to side.

"Lord, don't let it get me," he said in a whisper. "Wasp stings is pure poison to me."

Now, if I'd heard tell about what happened next I never would of believed it, but before I could blink an eye Ichabod opened his mouth, something long and thin shot out of it and that wasp was gone, just off into thin air. Ichabod set back on the bench and swallowed. I looked at Doc. His face had turned white as his hair.

"Uh, uh," he said. He sounded like someone had hit him in the belly.

"You ate—you ate—" I said, and Ichabod all of a sudden looked a little worried.

"I did wrong? I'm aware our diet is not like yours. We researched your habits, you see." He looked around like he maybe needed help, but none of the other truck folks was close by. "However, in most ways we are alike. Was that—tell me if I did wrong."

Doc was still wheezing, but my wind came back and I opened up to let out a whoop.

"YOU ATE A—"

And just like that my head was full of the feathers, fuller than it had ever been. What Ichabod had done seemed like the most natural thing I could think of. When I looked over at Doc, he was grinning and his color had come back.

"Do that again," he said, and slapped his knee. " 'Y God, that's the best trick I ever saw!"

"Are you sure?" Ichabod still had a worried look.

"Sure! Do it again. Come on, I didn't catch it good last time."

So Ichabod did it again. His tongue shot out a good foot and clobbered a horsefly minding his own business. That old fly never knew what had him—one gulp and he was gone. Doc slapped his knee again and Ichabod smiled.

"Now I know why you folks don't open your mouths up when you talk," I said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ichabod nodded. "Little Nell wasn't sure of your reaction," he said. "We want you to like us, you see."

"Like you!" Doc gave him a mighty poke on the shoulder. "Hell, boy, I love you like a brother! Wait till the rest of the folks hear about this!"

My feet was dancing to get off and tell the boys. Tom Crabtree had ate a cricket once on a dare, but it made him puke. Here Ichabod had just chomped a horsefly and a wasp, stinger and all, and never batted an eye. I was busting to bring everyone to see.

"No, please," Ichabod said. "Not now. Let all of us from the—truck come meet with you tonight. We will sit down together and talk about our differences. We have grown quite fond of you folks in the holler, and it would make us very unhappy if this trait of ours should spoil your caring for us."

"Well, all right," Doc said after he thought a while. "You're right, some folks might be a little skittish, especially the women. You all come up to the store tonight after supper and we'll talk it out."

I sailed home to tell Mama first thing, but she wasn't there and Daddy was out preaching in the yard, so I took a couple of cold biscuits and snuck out to the woods by the truck to see if I could catch any of the others doing what Ichabod had done. Most of the ones I could see was just laying around taking it easy like the folks back in town. Pretty soon I went off into the woods to sit and think about it all. Once I thought I heard Mama's voice somewhere not far off, but I called and nobody answered. After a little bit, I fell asleep.

I tell you, the general store was busting its seams that night. None of the truck folks was there yet when I got there. I couldn't see Miss Margaret in the crowd, but I heard her, and she sure sounded riled.

"Of all the—we can't have folks going around eating bugs! It's not right! What kind of bringing up—it makes you wonder, don't it now?"

"I knew I should of shot 'em right off," Buck Lacey said from somewhere.

I felt a hand on my hair and there was Mama, smelling nice, like talcum. She give me a hug and said, "Grady, I ain't seen you all day hardly. You stayin' out of mischief?"

"Sure, Mama. I thought I heard you in the woods this afternoon. Was you berrying? I would of helped you if you said."

For a minute her face looked sad. "Why, I wasn't in the woods, honey. I don't know who you heard, but it wasn't me."

"Here they come!" someone bawled. "They're comin' now! Lord, can you believe what Doc's been sayin?"

"I don't like it," I heard Miss Margaret say. "Don't like it one little bit."

"Miss Margaret, think of the locusts," Doc's voice said. "Ain't they about wiped us out every year they come?"

Then the truck folks was there, Little Nell up front. When he passed by Mama and me, he smiled at her. I was standing right beside her and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I felt her shiver. Seemed a peculiar thing to do, it being so hot and close and all, but then everybody started talking at once and I forgot everything but trying to take it all in.

It was fierce for a while, everybody hollering to be heard, but folks said later that when their heads started to fill up with them nice feathers things seemed clearer, and before the night was over all the truck folks was rolling out their tongues for us to see. They even had races, to see who could collar a fly or mosquito first, and us folks took to rooting for first one, then the other.

"Ain't that something?" Buck Lacey kept bawling over and over. "Like a old bullfrog or lizard, 'y God! Say, I want to do that! Somebody show me how that's done!"

Miss Margaret finally took charge. "Now, I'm going to get pictures for you folks," she said. "Some things you got to let alone, ladybugs and things like that. Honeybees—don't mess around with honeybees, they help us folks. But grasshoppers and aphids and tomato worm—and locusts. Lord, you get rid of every one of them pesky locusts you can find!"

Everybody clapped and stomped, and the folks from the truck just grinned and grinned, they looked so pleased we liked them so much. I looked around for Mama and she was gone. I don't know why it come to me to look for Little Nell, but it did, and he didn't seem to be around either.

I heard Ichabod say, "Well, I don't know how much longer we'll be here. Our repairs are almost completed, but we'll surely do all we can for you folks while we're here."

Then there was a lot of hugging and slapping on the back and the meeting was over. I couldn't remember when I felt so good, but I couldn't help wondering just a little bit about Mama. She'd been acting peculiar lately. I went home and right to bed, I was that wore out.

A few days later the locusts hit, and they was bad, all right. Little Nell and his folks lit into them—us in town even caught them in fruit jars and hauled them out to the truck, and little by little the locusts began to fall off. It was pure astonishing how many of them things those truck folks could eat. Little Nell made them all study the pictures Miss Margaret tacked up in the store, and they was real nice about leaving the good bugs alone. Everybody's gardens looked like they was going to be prime that summer. Folks in town just kept getting happier all the time.

Pretty soon, though, we started to think about how it'd be after they was gone. Ichabod said the truck was almost ready to roll.

"Shoot," I heard Miss Margaret tell Doc, "won't be the same around this old place without 'em."

Along about sweet corn time, Doc and Miss Margaret decided to throw a picnic. The locusts had hardly made a dent in us and everyone wanted to show the truck folks how much we felt beholden. The women cooked for a week, gathered up gallons of bugs for the truck folks—there was going to be dancing and everything out in front of the store. By the time

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the big day finally came, I was so raring to go I felt like I was about to be shot out of a gun.

I was out on the front porch ready to go at sundown. Daddy was out back practicing a sermon he wanted to preach before the do was over, when Mama come out and set down beside me on the step. She hugged me and I hugged back.

"Hear it, Mama? Skeeter's juicin' up his fiddle. Lordy, ain't it going to be a night?"

She hugged me again. I was surprised to see her blue eyes full up with tears.

"What's the matter, mama? You sick?"

"Grady, you know how Mama loves you, don't you, son?"

"Sure I do."

"Don't never forget it. Sometimes when your daddy—well, you know how he is—"

"He hit you again? Is that it?"

"Not this time."

"Don't mind him, Mama. Just stay clear. That's what I do."

She sighed. "Well, sometimes that works, sometimes it don't. Sometimes I get the itch to go off somewhere—where it's happy and I can see the sights. You understand me, honey?"

"No, ma'am."

"Maybe you will someday. I just want you to know Mama loves you something fierce. I'll never love anyone half so much as you."

Now, too much of that kind of talk made me squirm.

"I know. Me too, Mama. Is it all right can I go to the picnic now?"

"Sure." She hugged me again. "Go on and have some fun. I be down later, all right?"

And it was a fine party. Everybody danced, even us boys. Most of the men got likkered up on Lacey corn, and we all et till our cheeks puffed out. The truck folks had never square danced, but once they got the hang of it they kept at it until they fell down and had to rest. I never had such a good time at a party before or since. So, when somebody let out a little scream, at first everyone thought it was just high spirits, but then it come again and all the talk and music stopped till it was still as death.

Ichabod had his arm around Cleopatra, and she looked like she was about to faint.

"Gone?" she hollered, and everyone crowded around her. Ichabod's whole body was shaking, even through his overalls.

"Gone!" Cleopatra hollered out again. "This is the end! We're doomed!"

"What? What?" people started to say.

Ichabod raised up his hand. "Please. Please," he said. His face looked almost green. "I'm sorry, I have some terrible news."

"What? What?"

"It seems—" he swallowed so loud we could all hear it "—it seems that—" he said one of them funny names "—I mean, Little Nell has gone.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Abandoned us. Celie Pike went with him. It would appear they've run away."

Mama!

Cleopatra let out a mournful moan. "I didn't even—oh, Lordy, I didn't even know!"

"You mean—the truck and everything?" Doc finally whispered.

"Yes. Gone," Ichabod said. He looked fit to cry.

"Oh, my sakes!" Miss Margaret said, and clapped her old arm around me.

Now I knew what Mama had been saying to me. She'd run off with Little Nell. If Daddy ever caught up with them, he'd kill them both. I looked around for him. He was sleeping peaceful on the ground beside the barbecue, so I figured it best to just let him be a while.

It was like going to the graveyard, that procession out to where the truck had been. Everybody went, and when we got there we all just hung around where the funny-looking thing had stood.

Miss Margaret squinted off up the hill into the timber. "I don't see how they could have took off up there without some of us hearing," she said.

"They could," Ichabod said. "Believe me, it would be no problem."

"Where you suppose they're going to go?"

Ichabod breathed in, all shaky. "Yes, indeed. Where are they going to go?"

"You could light out after 'em," someone said. "They couldn't have got far."

"Far enough." Ichabod smiled a funny little smile. "We'll never find them. We are marooned." Some of the truck folks started to cry. Their eyes looked scared. "I don't know what we are going to do."

Miss Margaret could always take charge quicker than anyone around. She looked at all of us and drew in her chin till it almost met up with her breastbone.

"Do? You'll stay here, of course. Don't start talking like a fool."

Ichabod's eyes lit up a bit. "Do you mean we could stay? For what appears to be a—a very long spell?"

"How will we live?" one of the truck folks whispered.

"Shoot," Miss Margaret said, "just like you been livin'. We got enough bugs around here to last you all a lifetime. Ain't that right?" She looked around at us and no one made a fuss, not even Buck Lacey. "Far as we're concerned, you're welcome. We'd be proud to have you. You're like our own. You're folks!"

Well, of course, this all took place a long while back. After the first fuss everybody settled down right quick and the truck folks started moving into town.

Daddy got a little hot when he sobered up and found Mama was gone. He poked around in the timber some, but he never found a trace, so he got tired and come on back home. Us and the truck folks took to living

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

together like it was natural, and pretty soon Daddy up and married himself off to one, Evangeline. Most folks reckoned nobody else would have him, but it worked out fine and pretty soon other folks was doing it, too. Before long you could hardly tell one of us from the other.

We found out the truck folks had some fine ways of doing things. They could heal a person quicker than a wink, just by thinking at them and putting their hands on the places that hurt. Miss Margaret reared back at that at first—she was a powerful believer in her roots and herbs—but nobody could argue that it worked, so gradually we just started letting the truck folks take care of all our ailments.

They could fix things, too—they was a whiz at machinery. Ichabod was the best. Before long he had more fixing than he could handle, so he set up a little shop. He showed us boys how to do some things, but there was others he could do that none of us ever got the hang of.

Sure, I thought of Mama. I still do. I believe I understand a little of what she said that night, and I hope she got to go to some nice places, be happy and see the sights.

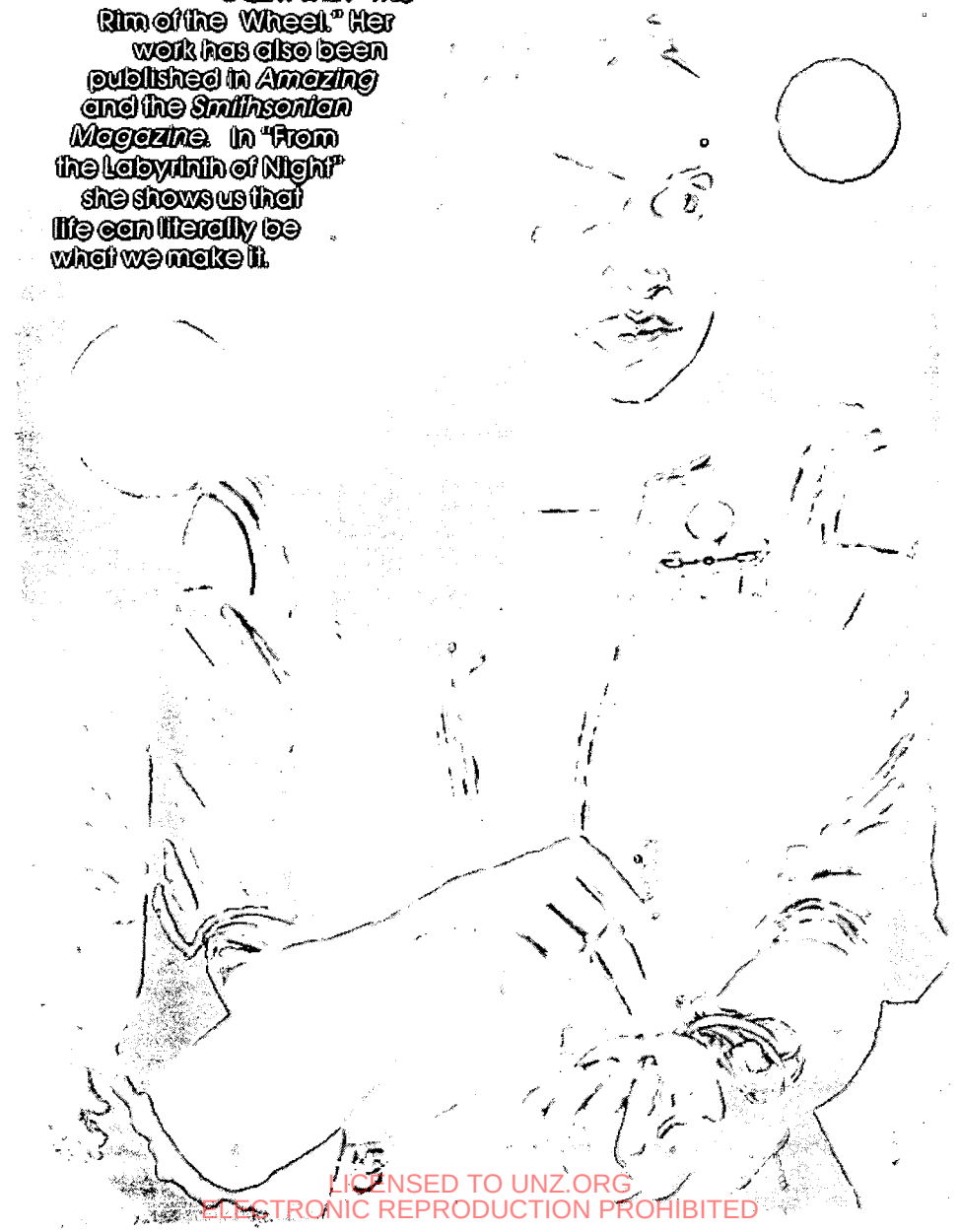
Me, I never got the itch the way she did. Blue Crick Holler was always just fine for me. When Hamlet and me got growed Daddy married us, and she's about as good a wife as any man could expect. Miss Margaret showed her how to cook all the good things a man just naturally likes, and having her around is most times nothing but pure pleasure. Oh, she's pesky sometimes—most women is—but I don't let it bother me none.

Now we even got a little girl named Joella. She's the spittin' likeness of Mama, all yellow hair and big blue eyes. I have to admit it bothered me some the first time I seen that baby girl bring down a mosquito. I was kind of hoping she'd take to fried chicken and cornbread, just like her daddy. Once in a while I even wonder what the holler will be like—oh, maybe a hundred years from now, how many of us will be chicken eaters and how many hankering after bugs.

But, shoot, everyone gets along just fine. And I tell you, with Hamlet and Joella around, there ain't never been a fly draw more than two full breaths inside *my* house. You can take that for a fact. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The author made her first appearance in *Asim* with "The Rim of the Wheel." Her work has also been published in *Amazing* and the *Smithsonian Magazine*. In "From the Labyrinth of Night" she shows us that life can literally be what we make it.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FROM THE LABYRINTH OF NIGHT

by Lillian Stewart Carl

art: Hank Jankus

Nightfall. The rocky galleries flooded with shadow. Hurriedly David threw his samples into the back of the rover and set it to the laborious climb out of the Noctis Labyrinthis. The engine protested, groaning, crawling up the heavily eroded escarpment, pushed to the limit.

There. He achieved the last sheen of sunlight and was saved from creeping darkness. He sighed, relieved, and his visor fogged briefly with his breath. Before him, across the smoother ground, the trail was muted with the fine red dust that eddied like liquid cinnamon into the ruts. But it was a trail; it led to shelter. A human voice, and, of course, *her*.

The rover bounced on, hugging the rim of the light, gaining on the darkness. A cloud of crimson particles billowed from the oversized wheels, veiling the horizon and the face of a small, raw sun.

David glanced to his left, to where the world came to an abrupt edge. He hesitated, gauged the remaining light, turned aside from the path. A low rise, a jumbled set of ruts, and a chasm yawned before him. Pinnacles of layered rock, ravines flowing rivers of dust, colors rippling and heaving as if the torn crust of Mars quivered like a wounded animal. Night pooled in the depths, drawing the wind from the light, voices wailing about the ocher spires.

Vertigo welled from the abyss, plucking at him. He shuddered in sudden terror. He inhaled deeply of his personal bubble of atmosphere, tilted his helmeted face to the lowering pink sky, raised his gloved hands, and declaimed in a desperate defiance, "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings; look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His voice emerged from the speaker, a feeble mutter that was whipped away and dissipated into darkness. The wind sang, echoing in his audio receivers. He turned, crushed, the rosy haze of dusk was almost upon him. "Nothing beside remains," he whispered. "Boundless and bare, the lone and level sands stretch far away."

Shadows crept out of the Labyrinth of Night, pursuing the tiny rover across the plain like dark grasping fingers. David set his mouth; it would be foolish to look behind him, he was one of the only two living creatures in this entire sector of Mars—still his neck prickled. Brought too much emotional baggage, he told himself. Think too much. Fear from within, not without.

There was the camp, the life unit like a giant clamshell half-buried in the sand. His first days there David had built a low rock wall around it, as carefully as a New England farmer clearing a field; now only a few boulders showed above the red dust. Mars was not quite ready to accept human artifacts. He slowed, edged the rover in close to the shelter, stopped. Clumsily he scrambled out and turned to retrieve the samples. In this batch, perhaps, the evidence of extraterrestrial life. But he doubted that man would ever find new life; we're alone, folks, stuck with our terrors. . . .

Behind him the door of the shelter opened. "Were you delayed?" The voice was soft, carefully modulated, with a note of music in it. Someone had taken great care with that synthesizer. And another voice, harsh and masculine, "What kept you, David? I was about to eat your rations!"

With an effort David hoisted the containers. Irene stepped out of the airlock and lifted them effortlessly from his gloves with her slender pale hands. "Yeah, thanks," he began. She turned back into the shelter.

David secured the rover and cast one last, suspicious, glance around the misty horizon. Nothing. A crimson blotch, the oversized star that was the sun, and the eternal pink sky. He craved green the way a starving man craves food.

He turned his back on Mars and ducked inside the shelter, pausing in the suiting chamber to divest himself of helmet and suit and boots and powerpacks. Irene was already returning from the lab to the main room, a slender coveralled figure winking from light to puddle of fluorescent light.

Andrei sat at the table, a tray of root vegetables before him. "What kept you?" he asked again.

"Woolgathering, as usual," David replied. He sat down.

Irene produced another food tray from the warmer and set it before him. "Do you need anything else?" she asked. "Water ration?"

"Yes. Dust in my throat."

"Something wrong with your suit?" Andrei asked. His eyes were blue, their gaze sharp as a surgeon's dissecting scalpel.

David avoided them, seizing the cup and pouring the liquid into his mouth. Tasteless, distilled from subsurface ice, molecules of an alien

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

world flowing into his body. He wondered if they would make of him some alien life form. "No, nothing's wrong with my suit. Just that staring at the dust all day makes me feel as if I'm choking on it."

Andrei's keen glance shifted, granting reprieve. "When I was a kid," he said, "we'd go on hiking trips through Bryce Canyon, clambering up and down the bluffs like monkeys. Not so different from here, really, except for the suits. And the cold."

"No snakes," David said. Andrei was trying to cheer him up; he should cooperate. He dived with a show of enthusiasm into the vegetable stew. Not bad. Not good either. Earth roots, processed in Martian soil—a different tang to ordinary potatoes and carrots.

"Irene," Andrei called, and she turned from her task. "Go ahead and check yourself out. We have a chess game later on."

"Why do you keep on playing?" David asked. "She always beats you."

"Mind over matter. Some day I'm going to win."

"It's her mind. . . ." David began, and cut himself off.

Irene seated herself and plugged the electrodes into her fingertips. Meters flickered, testing the circuits of her artificial nerves. She was still, chiseled profile set, fiber-optic eyes closed; the faintest blush of color touched her polymer cheeks, an indication of energy level, not emotion.

"She looks real," David hissed, as if it mattered if she heard him.

"A human form is the most efficient for the multiple tasks she's required to do. So the lab decided to give her eyelashes and teeth and hair, and to wire her computer brain like a woman's."

"Engrams complementary to ours—that's what they told us, isn't it? But I don't think they provided us grizzled prospectors with a female companion just out of the goodness of their hearts."

The blue gaze fixed him once again, peeling away layer after layer of pretense. "Of course not. It's an experiment in cultural evolution, and we're part of it. That's why we're here, scientific curiosity."

That's why you're here, David thought, avoiding the older man's eyes. "I don't know. I just have a—a feeling. One of the puny intuitions left to us human types." Irene—One Robot something something Experimental—was a great scientific breakthrough for his ex-wife's biotechnical research and development team. His own nerves twinged whenever she plugged herself in like that. A technological stigmata.

Rest period. His 'phones filled with the soothing resonance of music. A Bach concerto—precise, clear, ordered notes, a wave front through his mind. His neurons triggered by each quantum of sound, electrical signals comprehended in the infinite labyrinth of his brain, firing his senses with pleasure, with pain, with memory.

"Marian, a computer can never be self-aware—it can never live. It's a binary system. Magnetic bubbles, protein chips, whatever, it simply isn't as complex as a brain. You can't program it with all the subtle instinctive leaps of comprehension."

She turned away, as she had turned away so often in the last days. A

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

defense, perhaps, against the memory of their baby. Their human child, vulnerable to accident, to death. "Information theory," she said impatiently, her hand on the door. "We'll be providing the construct with a grammar for learning."

"It can never be more than a machine."

"We're nothing more than molecular machines." The door opened.

He grew impatient in turn. "We're alive, Marian. And we can create new life only one way."

Her spine snapped erect, her jaw tightened, denying the agony. Wordlessly she stepped through the doorway and was gone.

And yet, David told himself, the denial was in itself agony. It used to be that men joined the Foreign Legion to forget a failed marriage; now, evidently, they volunteered for a field researcher's post on Mars. A scientist's heaven, the Noctis Labyrinthis, layer upon layer of ancient rock—the Labyrinth of Night—the labyrinth, the place of the *labrys*, the double axe, reverberating to the bellows of the Minotaur—half-man, half-beast, an artificial construct—devouring the Athenian children—a child, a child, a child.

He started upwards, his heart pounding from the brief yet vivid nightmare. The music was over; static hissed in his ears. He flicked off the disk player, looked around at the temporarily unfamiliar shelter, calmed himself.

"Check," said Irene.

Andrei groaned. "I thought I had you foxed this time. But I'll beat you yet, honey. They couldn't have crammed that many impulses into those teeny, tiny protein chips in your mind." He extracted his king from danger.

Irene regarded the chessmen. David regarded her. Funny—you wouldn't expect her artificial mind to change the expression of her artificial face—why bother programming her to lower her lashes over her eyes, to smile confidently as she shifted a piece, to tap one long forefinger impatiently beside the chess board? Emotions were merely biochemical tides in the brain—she was much better off without them. Andrei moved, she moved again; "Checkmate," she said, and there was well-modulated triumph in her voice.

"Aargh!" Andrei exclaimed. "Too quick for me. Again tomorrow?"

In a few swift movements she cleared away the game. "Certainly. I'll go check on the culture tubes now."

Let the human guinea pigs get their ration of sleep.

Andrei stood, stretching, and realized David was watching him. "You wonder," he grinned, "why they even bothered to send us along."

Irene glanced back from the doorway. "To keep me amused," she called, perfectly deadpan.

There was something about her attitude as she moved. "Good Lord, now she's making jokes," David said quickly, shrugging away his paranoia.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"She learns fast. Good night, David."

"Good night." He checked the readouts, secured the door, glanced out a dust-scummed porthole. Nothing outside. Nothing inside. In the lab Irene's movements were smooth, efficient, silent.

David lay awake a long time, brooding, but he reached only the certainty that nothing was certain.

The coffee was hot; David took a quick gulp and then stood swishing it around his mouth in a futile effort to keep from burning his tongue. "Damn."

Andrei was already suiting up. "See any likely-looking spots in the Labyrinth yesterday?" he called.

David returned, "Yeah. Check that gully a kilometer beyond the second marker. There seemed to be some interesting sandstone, but it was getting dark so I bailed out."

"Right."

Irene strolled through the airlock. "The empty sample containers and your tackle are on the rover."

"Thanks," Andrei told her, and with a wave of his bulkily suited arm and hand, "See you at quitting time, David."

"Keep in touch," David called after him. The coffee was a little cooler; he took another sip. The caffeine receptors in his brain were working nicely and he felt measurably more alert.

Irene was waiting. "The microbiology experiments are ready," she told him.

Reluctantly he set down the cup. His body walked into the lab; his mind followed Andrei and the rover, dwindling into a foggy peach-colored dawn. The Noctis Labyrinthis would be filled with mist, the jagged cliffs blotted into a deceptive softness, the wind still. The Labyrinth would be waiting.

All right, all right, he told himself. He bent over the readouts. Spectrometer readings were inconclusive, as usual. The Martian topsoil, with its high proportion of windblown montmorrilonite clay, absorbed and released gases in a mimicry of respiration and photosynthesis. A nice problem in inorganic chemistry, but no proof of life, microbial or otherwise.

"We'll have to refine the experiment," he told Irene, and she immediately offered several good suggestions. Work was therapeutic, David thought. He'd been thinking that a lot recently. But the problem was an interesting one, and before long he was absorbed in his task.

When he finally looked up, he was surprised at how many numbers had clicked over on the chronometer. It was long past time for Andrei to check in. Any number of things could have delayed him, David told himself. Nothing to worry about. But his shoulder blades twitched, an icicle forming along his spine.

The dark lenses of Irene's eyes dilated suddenly, and her chin went up

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in an unmistakable gesture of listening. Even as she moved the radio beacon let out a brief chirp.

David was on it in a moment. "Andrei?" Silence. "Andrei, are you all right?" The speaker stared back at him, mute. Hell, David thought, if he'd only tried to contact him earlier—but that wasn't standard procedure.

Irene was dialing the rangefinder, activating the remote controls of the rover, her movements an abrupt staccato compared to her usual grace. As if she, too, had nerves that sang, stretched in quivering intensity.

David headed for the suiting chamber and pulled on his protective garments, forcing his fingers to move slowly over the catches and seals. Irene plunged out the airlock, and he cursed his own dependence on the temperature, the atmosphere, the pressure of just one planet.

At last he stood beside her, just where the stone boundary rumpled the blanket of red dust, dialing the scanner in his visor to highest magnification. The horizon remained blank, an indeterminate smear of orange ground and pink sky. But no—there it was. First the dust cloud, and then the squat dark beetle of the rover itself, bouncing over the rocks toward them. Empty.

Irene's vocal synthesizer hummed with a sound that in a human being would have been a moan.

They found him at nightfall, a crumple of silver caught on a spire of rock that protruded from the jagged cliff face. From the lookout point at the edge of the Noctis Labyrinthis, where the tangle of ruts indicated a brief human presence.

"At least he made it up here," David said. He was cold, shivering uncontrollably despite the sweat that clogged his suit. "At least he made it into the light." The place of the double axe, light and dark, life and death.

Irene scanned the area, eyes narrowed. "He always stopped here, just as you did. Two sets of ruts."

"Ozymandias," David muttered. Of course she would notice the ruts. If he could just complete a sentence, maybe it would be all right. With an effort he inhaled, and his lungs fluttered. "I'll get a rope. We'll have to bring him up. Maybe he's still . . ."

"Alive?" queried Irene. But of course he wasn't.

David got the rope from the rover, hesitated, placed an end of it in Irene's outstretched hand. She wrapped it about her waist with an expert mountaineer's knot and started down the escarpment. For just a moment she glanced up, her eyes meeting his—her eyes, bright with a sheen of awareness.

Laughing, "I'll never understand why you get such a charge out of rock-climbing, Marian." He braced himself as she slipped over the edge.

"The mind and body interface. The molecular machine at work."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You'll have to stop doing it pretty soon; you're growing altogether too great with child."

"Two for the price of one, David." She blew him a kiss, began her descent.

Was it that time she had slipped, or another? She'd suffered a broken leg, a couple of cracked ribs, nothing serious. But the baby—for her, then, work became more than therapy. It became an obsession.

None, David thought. None, for a high, high price. Andrei, no.

Irene was fully equipped with waldos in her fingers and arms and legs; she needed the rope only to steady herself. Like a fly she crept downwards, clinging to the rough face of the rock. Once she slipped, but by the time David could clutch convulsively at the rope she was already clasped to another microscopic cranny.

She stopped on a narrow ledge, excavated handholds and footholds, reached over to the spire. The silver helmet wobbled loosely as she touched it. She paused a moment, her head bowed as if genuflecting; then she pulled the smashed form into her arms.

A twenty-first century Pieta. David knelt a meter back from the rim, his stomach yawning, dizzy. The vertigo. He'd never before left the rover. Sitting in the rover he'd felt safe. But Andrei had climbed out and walked to the edge, enjoying the view. Too close to the edge; the footprints, the red gash where the sand had given way, were painfully apparent. If only he—if only—what could he ever have done? Andrei, no, not you too.

Night gathered in the depths of the Labyrinth. The wind shrieked down the galleries, spinning swirls of dust upwards into the dusk. Irene was moving, carrying the carbon-based husk of what had once been a life form. Numbly David pulled on the rope, helped her to wrestle her burden over the edge, placed it with less reverence than despair in the rover. Behind the scratched visor Andrei's eyes, a piercing blue, stared stubbornly upward into the sky. But this sky did not reflect their color.

"Come on," David said. He snapped his teeth shut on the words. They drove in silence back to the shelter, and the shadows of night followed close behind them.

David threw himself down in the chair. He was so tired even his bones ached. His geologist's pick seemed to be embedded in his head, its point caught in his throat, choking him. He reached desperately for his box of disks and inserted one into the player.

It hadn't taken long. The emergency call to Chryse Base, the shuttlecraft's landing lights flaring through the portholes, the poor, weak, smashed human form bundled away. "Yeah, I'll stay here," he told the commander. "Don't have anywhere else to go."

Music. Soothing music. Vaughn Williams' "The Lark Ascending." Ascending, perhaps, like a human soul with wings into the blue vault of Earth's heaven—carbon-based life forms died too easily, too easily.

He noticed that Irene was bringing in the sample containers from the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rover. The ones Andrei had filled. She set them down, glanced at David, reached for the chess set. "You don't play, do you?" she murmured.

"No." The music filled the labyrinth of his consciousness; a violin, a clean melodic line spiraling upwards, upwards, until its clarity burst like bubble and the orchestra answered, caught it, brought it back down to human grief.

"You don't feel a thing do you?"

"Marian, how. . . ."

"You could get blood from a stone easier than I could get some emotion out of you, a tear, for God's sake, one lousy tear."

"Marian, please."

It hurts too much, it hurts, it hurts—the purity of the music, the violin floating effortlessly up—the orchestra embracing it.

Irene opened the box, picked out a pawn, held it a moment and then crushed it to powder in her hydraulically tightened fist.

The music tore his senses into raw, aching shreds. The catch in his throat burst. He bent his head and the tears came unbidden, wracked from his eyes by great, gasping sobs—nothing, nothing, nothing.

A hand touched him, taking his in a gentle grasp. "They didn't give me tear ducts," she said, "and yet I share the sorrow." The curls of her nylon-filament hair shook, trembling like leaves driven before a storm. Her whole body was trembling. Poor silicon-based life-form, having to learn so much. David pulled her up beside him.

His tears were quickly spent, the paroxysm leaving him weak and numb. Her trembling ceased and she lay, eyes closed and lips tight, against his shoulder. The music died away into one last resonance passed from body to body. Some robot, he thought with that faint prick of intuition, she's too much more than a robot. But the luxury of not thinking was seductive, and he surrendered to thoughtlessness.

Soon after dawn the outside sensors registered three dustdevils wavering above the Noctis Labyrinthis, the vanguard of a sandstorm. David and Irene barely had time to secure the rover and prepare the heavy-duty filters before a tidal wave of dark crimson dust like dried blood crashed over them. The wind that drove it screamed and sobbed and howled, the proverbial soul in torment.

The work had to be done, so they turned on lights that gleamed oddly pale in the artificial dusk, and worked. Therapy, David explained; Irene nodded as if she understood. His tears had been cathartic, he assured himself; he was calm now, and his thoughts ticked over as quietly as the numbers on the chronometer. But he needed to play disk after disk, pulling the music like a cloak around him, warming the cold kernel of grief in his heart.

That day wore on, and night came, and day again. The harsh blue-gray luminescence of the fluoros left David's eyes raw, slightly unfocussed, like the waving stalks of some sea-creature. No seas here. Just

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the wind, trying to speak, trying to blot out his music—Andrei, the child. He botched an oxygen measurement, spat an oath between his teeth, strode into the other room to check on Irene.

She was hunched over a readout, staring expressionlessly at Andrei's still sealed sample cases. With a sigh he leaned over her shoulder to squint at the flickering screen before her.

"Don't get any bright ideas," she said. "Tear ducts aren't the only body parts I'm missing."

David stepped back from her so quickly he almost tripped over his own feet. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"You know darn well. Breathing down my neck while I'm trying to work." She extinguished the readout, wrenched the covers from Andrei's sample cases and sent them crashing onto the table.

"It's my work too. And I've been at it a lot longer than you have. Just because you don't even breathe." He spun away, exasperated. Lord, she was getting to be more like Marian every moment. He had quite a talent, it seemed, for turning perfectly pleasant women into bitches. But this one wasn't a woman, wasn't human. She was a pawn. He was a pawn.

Dust matted the portholes, clogged his throat. The life unit was less a shelter than a trap. David kicked petulantly at a chair, which turned over and dealt his table a resounding blow. The disk player plunged to the floor. The "Liebestod" died, squealing, and the wind laughed hysterically at the window.

"No," David said, too stricken even to swear. Not the music. He couldn't even keep that.

"David!" Irene was in the doorway again, eyes wide, excited. "Come look at these samples."

He didn't care. He was tired. Maybe the wind was in itself music, calling to him. The Labyrinth, and the embrace of the Minotaur.

"David." She was beside him, her hand on his arm. "I—I'm sorry I spoke harshly—I don't know why."

Wearily he looked at her. No, she didn't know. But she did care. The machine cared more than the man. He shook himself, awakening his intellect, and followed her into the lab.

A row of rock samples lay under the light, cores of the everlasting sandstone, layers of orange and pink like a birthday cake. Although these particular samples seemed to have come from a less weathered area. Where was it Andrei had gone—beyond the second marker in the Labyrinth?

David lifted a small pick and chipped at the largest sample. His eyes focussed, and he blinked. No, he wasn't seeing it.

He was seeing it. Green. Minute threads of green inside the rock. "I'll be damned," he whispered. "There it is."

"Just like Vishniac predicted forty years ago," said Irene. "Algae living inside the rock itself, sheltered from the cold, from the germicidal ultraviolet."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Such algae had been discovered in the dry valleys of Antarctica; David had trained for the Mars mission there, where the bleak wastes had seemed so in tune with his mood. But to find it here, to find the first evidence of naturally-evolving extra-terrestrial life. . . .

"I'll be damned," he said. And he grinned in a sudden dry irony. Maybe he had been damned. Maybe he was a lost soul—but, but, it was life. "God," he said, not in an expletive but a prayer. "We're not alone. A lousy handful of algae, but it's alive, evolving. . . ."

Irene watched, alert; he could almost hear the molecular gates in her mind opening and closing, building a frame, learning. "Algae here—what will we find on Titan? Farther?"

"Just wait. There'll be lawsuits into the next century, the leave-it-alone environmentalists against the industrialists who would use this little scrap of green as a genetic base for terraforming. . . ." He laughed. "A future, you see? It's a future!"

"Yes," she said. "A future. Not alone. I understand."

And, David told himself, she did.

As if on cue the storm ceased, the wind died, the last grains of blown sand slid rattling down the sides of the shelter and came to rest. The sun was a red blotch in a salmon-colored sky. The crescent of stones before the life unit stood up from the dust, scoured clean. There was just enough light left in the day to find the site of those algae-bearing rocks.

David guided the rover down the escarpment into the Noctis Labyrinthis. The trail was completely covered with sand, the pinnacles and galleries of rock softened by drifts, but he knew the way to go. Beside him Irene clung to her seat, her face flushed in the cold wind—antifreeze in her blood, David told himself.

The first marker had been obliterated. The second, placed higher up a cliff, was barely discernable. Beyond—David was getting onto unfamiliar ground here, and he slowed. The torn and tumbled stone of the Labyrinth surrounded the rover, the narrow passageways already beginning to fill with rose-tinted shadow.

"There," Irene said, pointing to the right. And there was a row of neat holes drilled in a sheltered cliff face.

Irene leaped from the rover, leaving David in his protective suit to clamber awkwardly after. By the time he'd waddled to the cliff face she was already taking more samples. Hurriedly he activated his instruments and began recording the particulars of temperature, radiation, wind chill. Had Andrei known, he wondered, what he had found? Was that why he had stopped at the lookout, in pleasure, enjoying the prospect of a Mars no longer hostile?

The darkness was thickening. The wind, pulled by the temperature differential between sunlight and shadow, purled through the galleries. "Ready?" David asked.

"Yes," Irene replied. But she hesitated as he climbed back into the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rover, peering, head cocked to the side, down the echoing crevices of the Labyrinth. She held one last sample in her hand. Two examples of alien life, David said to himself. But the algae was made of the same hydrocarbon compounds he was.

Irene settled into the rover with a perceptible shiver. "Spooky down here, isn't it? The wind could almost be the Minotaur calling for his sacrifice."

And if mind equals humanity—Irene, too much more than a robot—replicating the emotional biochemistry of a real person. David's mind made a quantum leap, synthesizing intuition into logical thought. "It had its sacrifice," he told her, in sudden and complete certainty. "It's been placated."

Marian, a computer can never be self-aware. It can never live. Not the first time he'd been wrong. But Marian had cheated.

He started the rover and guided it jouncing toward the escarpment. This time he was too preoccupied, too oddly exhilarated by his thought, to remember to race the dusk. And when the darkness overtook them he looked up in surprise. The night was a clear ruby faceted with stars, the last glow of the sun a blush on the cheek of night. It was beautiful.

"I've never seen you drive this slowly," Irene said. "I thought you were frightened of the Noctis Labyrinthis."

"I was, Ariadne. I was."

"Ariadne?" she asked. She frowned slightly, searching. "She gave Theseus a ball of string to guide him out of the Labyrinth."

"Or a collection of protein chips. Whatever." He parked the rover inside the arc of stones, powered down, contemplated the depths of the night.

"But why . . .?"

He smiled, secretly, inside his helmet. "You'll learn that, too."

Respiration, photosynthesis—yes, yes; David held an algae culture in his hand, marveling at it. The beginnings of the sort of genetic evolution that had culminated in his own body, in his own consciousness. He was pleased, and he was pleased with his pleasure. The low chords of Brahms' "Symphony in C Minor" vibrated through his senses, so echoing his thought that it was several seconds before he realized he was actually hearing it.

He set down the culture, cleared the spectograph and peered inquisitively into the other room. Irene sat at the table, a small soldering iron in her left hand. The tones of the symphony hung palpably in the air, in the structure of the life unit, in David's own body. "Irene?"

She turned, smiling. "It only needed a varistor."

"We don't have any varistors small enough."

"Yes we do." She held up her right hand. The smooth polymer skin of the palm gaped open, revealing the components beneath. It was like the scene in an old sci-fi movie, the heroine revealed to be an artificial construct. David shook his head and allowed himself a light chuckle.

DIGITIZED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This time it was almost the other way around.

Marian was left-handed. Of course Irene was too. Marian was a woman, and so was Irene. No wonder Irene learned so quickly the nuances of human consciousness, understanding too well to be a binary system.

"Thank you," he said.

She replied, "I missed the music. The resonance in my mind."

"Yes." And to himself he said, you cheated, Marian. You cheated, there in your biotech lab; you were driven to create life, not just an intelligent machine, so you created it in time-honored fashion, from your own. Irene, a super-sophisticated version of the disk player, playing back the mental patterns of her maker. Her protein-chip brain, responding to the frame of consciousness embedded in it and stimulated by the minds outside it, might even have begun spontaneously to grow new dendrites. Evolutionary punctualism, leaping to a new generation.

David turned and picked up the chess set. One pawn was gone; they could use a rock, perhaps. A colony of Martians. The beginnings of genetic evolution meeting the product of cultural evolution. "Could you teach me to play?" he asked, spreading the board on the table.

"Why, yes." Her skin was healed. Her two smallest fingers hung limp and useless.

"We'll get you—repaired," David assured her. "When we call Chryse with the good news."

"It doesn't hurt me. A rather odd sensation, though. I'm growing too. . . ."

"Human?" Yes, he'd wanted a child. But he certainly hadn't expected this. God, Marian, I'm not sure this is really fair. And yet he couldn't resent it.

"The queens on their own colors," Irene said. "And the pawns in front, to protect them." She seated herself and contemplated the board. "I—I think I'm beginning to understand. My own mind, I mean."

"Don't rush it. There're some things you're not going to want."

"The sorrow of it." Their eyes met. Her lenses were as sharp as surgeon's scalpels, peeling away layer after layer of pretense.

She had learned that from Andrei. "Yes," he said. "The sorrow, the guilt, the sheer cussedness of living. You survive, though, inside your rock."

She smiled at his simile. "And love, and the pain of loving."

"Yes, that too. Always that."

Each playing piece sat on its own square. "First move," Irene said. "Pawn to King Two." She took her role as teacher very seriously.

Perhaps thought is its own excuse for being, David told himself. Like beauty. The paraphrase seemed appropriate. He moved his own pawn.

"Second move."

Outside, the moonless darkness was pricked by light. Earth hung low on the horizon, the evening star. The wind from the Labyrinth of Night sang in perfect counterpoint to the symphony.

Irene looked up at David and laughed. ●

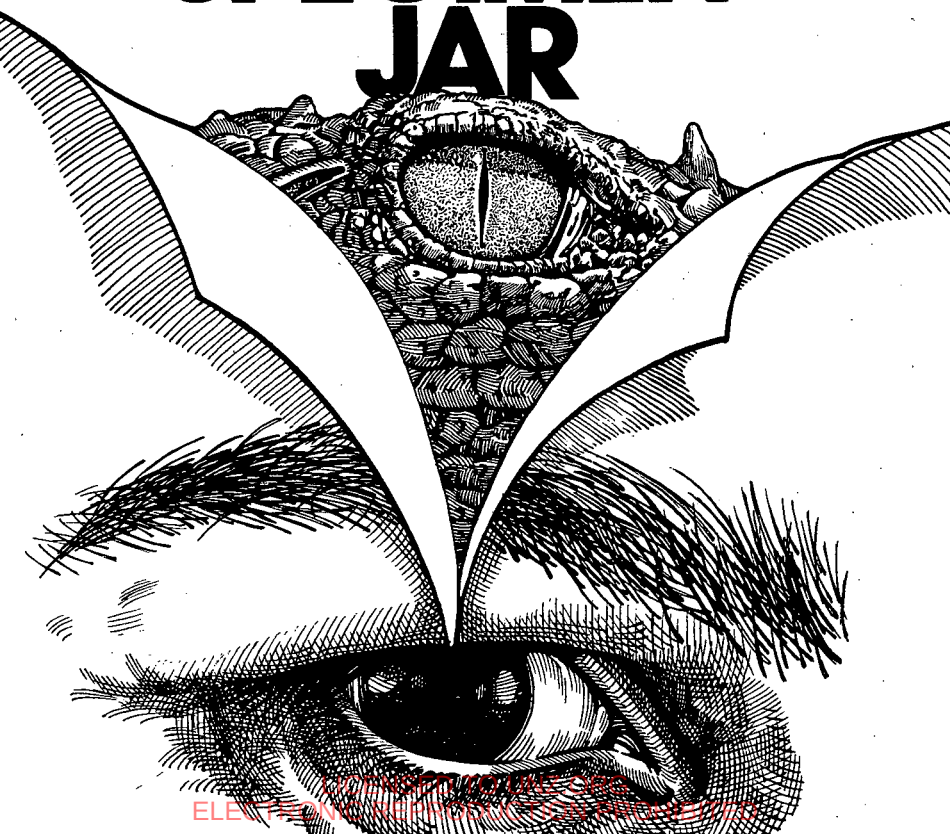
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

art: Robert McMahon

The author of this strange little tale currently lives in Princeton, NJ, with his wife and their eight-year-old son. His work has most recently appeared in two Ace anthologies, *Magic for Sale* and *Pawn to Infinity*, and in Warner's *Perpetual Light*.

by Daniel Gilbert

IN THE SPECIMEN JAR



LICENSED TO WWW.SFF.
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And then it bites my heart.

Quarantine is a twilight zone, an empty casket. The eight month voyage from Xeno-IV is a roman candle delight in comparison to this room. Space is indeed vast and lonely, but the infinity of six weeks in this ten-by-ten isolette is to space what a merry-go-round is to a Mobius strip.

And then it bites my heart.

Medicos in iso-suits are on top of me before I am aware of any pain. This quarantine room reads me as if I were an electroencephalographic comic book, a cardiac-monitored cartoon. *Aye, but it is necessary,* spake They Who Command. *For thou hast brought back with thee a parasite.* So I look at my fingers and look at my toes and I see no parasite, know no parasite, *feel* no parasite, and I ask the screen in my isolette, whom I have taken to calling Milton, I ask, "Is this parasite lost?"

And then it bites my heart.

Ungawa! It *is* a cold fever, as my chest locks and my arms cramp and gnarl. I am thrown to the floor. The medicos come rushing in, and long before my head smashes concrete I see in a slow-motion shot that they are jabbing me, plugging me in, ripping off my clothes, and even between peals of cardiac thunder I manage to wink at the little Japanese nurse as she grabs hold of my dong, wrenches it out of the way, and spears my femoral artery.

And I go down in pain like a dead monkey tossed to sea.

"Beep," says Milton.

"Beep," I say back. Dr. Kamikaze Nip, whose image appears on my screen, does not appreciate this frivolity. He wishes me to be grateful to the small persons of noble heritage who fished my craft from the sea, and grateful too that he speaks a reasonable facsimile of English for my benefit.

However, I am not fooled.

"Come now, Benton. Feeling better?"

I have repeatedly told Dr. Sushi Chopsticks to call me Ben. He does not believe me when I contend that only my mother has been allowed both to call me Benton *and* retain her natural teeth. However, I am impotent to stop him.

"Beep," I say impotently.

"Surely you can do better than that."

"How do you know that the beep you hear is not a malfunction of your sophisticated if not shoddily constructed Japanese hardware?" I smirk. "Perhaps I am attempting to divulge to you military secrets, and the American Consulate is using microwave transmissions to interfere with the communication? In fact, I have been attempting to inform you that the new KD-9 warhead utilizes a Beep Beep Beep at the very heart of its guidance system. You admit this is a revolutionary design?"

"Benton," says Dr. Sukiyaki Sake, but I must continue.

"I can't seem to get through to you from this quarantine cell." My eyes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

narrow as if preparing to betray a strict confidence. I lean closer to the screen. "Did you know that white women are able to Beep Beep Beep *three times* before they touch the floor with their tongues?" I nod gravely to tell him that as incredible as this sounds, it is nonetheless true.

He sighs. "We've isolated the parasite."

"Stop! Please! The secret sauce is a combination of Beep, Beep, and a dash of Beep." I shake my head profoundly. "There. You dragged it out of me, you inscrutable Oriental, you." Even though this news does make me feel like talking, I cannot stop doing this to Dr. Hari Kari Eggroll, because I neither like him nor trust him.

"As you say, Benton. Please call when you are prepared to listen."

His hand comes up toward the screen as if, with honorable Samurai restraint, he is going to compromise his anger, reach out of the screen, and tweak my nose mildly. But he simply twists the knob on his screen and Milton goes blank.

"Beep Beep Beep," I am heard to say.

"There is an alien living in my body."

I cannot help but wonder if Dr. Origami Wanton has ever toyed with the idea of replying, "Beep Beep Beep" when I offer a serious declaration. If so, he has shown admirable containment.

"Essentially so."

"Therefore," I continue, weaving strategically my polemic web, "I am an inhabited world and am due protection under the Non-Terran Preservation Act of 2006. Or do you intend to send mercenaries to my sinus cavities to begin the illegal exploitation of my natural mucosa?"

"None of the above, Benton."

"Is it sentient?" This question, being neither sarcastic in tone nor denigrating in content, takes him aback.

"As far as we can tell, yes."

I wonder just how far they *can* tell, and just how they can tell at all, and I realize that they cannot. Therefore he must be teasing me.

"You are teasing me."

"This organism feeds on the products of its host's cephalic processes." Dr. Zori Zero has earlier informed me that he is Japan's preeminent Extra-T microbiologist—this, the rationale behind my Consulate's decision to leave me in his care. I am unimpressed. "Your brain, Benton, is a virtual treasurehouse of these products—acetylcholine, GABA, norepinephrine. The parasite wants nothing to do with your gastrointestinal tract, but instead thrives on these physiological counterparts of thought. This is why your perceptions are affected."

"Startling Stories and Thrilling Tales of Indeed Much Wonder. There is nothing wrong with my perceptions."

"I see."

"You are evil, Dr. X, and everything they say about you is true, though I admit this information was supplied me by your close and trusted confidant, Beep Beep Beep."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We would like to schedule surgery for this afternoon."

I have lost, quite abruptly, my stoic facade, my calm veneer, and I suspect that within the smoldering slave-pits of Dr. Evil X's black heart he is joyous because of this.

"We've postponed this as long as we dare, Benton. I'm afraid your psychological condition may deteriorate rather than improve. You may already have sustained permanent damage."

"Beep."

He reaches for the knob.

"Wait."

"You are listening?"

"With the intensity of a Buddha, Oh Wicked Master."

"Removal of the parasite is imperative, Benton. Without it you'll be dead within a week. You will kindly sign your consent?"

I consider and realize that though I am frightened by the thought of surgery, I am frightened more so by this first real awareness I have yet had regarding my condition. If there *is* something—someone—inside me, someone nasty and foreign and alien, then he is someone whom my unconscious mind has most articulately described as icky. If he does exist, I do in fact wish to evict him.

"And you'll begin blacking out again."

Oh that Evil Sinister Dr. Evil X and his Truth Serum! That Lost Island of Dr. X and his Mad Evil Truth Serum that turns cats into dogs! I am undecided.

"Beep," I say, knowing this will buy me time.

And I see it then. I see it before he clears the screen. It is a weary look, some strange hybrid between disenchantment, disgust, and resignation. I see it and I know this:

Dr. X is breaking!

After fifteen hours of silence, I punch a password into Milton and find myself staring not into the inscrutable eyes of Dr. X, but at the dong-grabbing nurse. Ours is as close to a true sexual relationship as I have come in nearly nine months, and I cannot help but feel a whimsical fondness for her.

"I cannot use chopsticks," I tell her, indicating my dinner.

"*Nan to ii masu ka*?"

"I want a fork."

"*Fork*?" She repeats it quizzically.

"Fork. Fork."

"A-ha!" She waves a reproving finger at the screen. "No no no." She has obviously muddled the little English she knows. I decide that she is indeed not a woman of integrity and I can no longer feel a gentle affection for her. She reaches for the knob to clear the screen.

"No, no! Dr. Sukiyaki!"

"Sukiyaki?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Dr. No Ticky No Washy! Dr. Kabuki! Doc-tor—" I realize that I cannot remember—nor can I remember having learned—the true name of the Evil Dr. X.

"No no no." She giggles and shuts me off but I call back.

"This is Benton," I say sternly. "Connect me to the Mad Doctor at once. I *must* have a fork."

"Sukiyaki?" She blushes.

"Doctor! Slant-eyed butcher wielding scalpel! Yellow barbarian trained in rudiments of surgical technique!" I am beside myself.

"Fork?"

"Goddamned Yankee Doodle You Bet!"

"No no no."

I am raving. What's the word? "Doctor . . . *isha! Isha!*" Her eyebrows jump in comprehension and she cocks her head and smiles. She regards me in a new light, and I realize that perhaps I have been too quick to judge her.

"You speak Japanese quite nicely, Captain." She winks and connects me to the Maleficent Dr. Mikado.

"I cannot use chopsticks."

"You've been using them adequately for six weeks, Benton," he says.

I consider the logic of his argument and realize that he is quite correct. I do not understand why I am suddenly repulsed by the idea of eating with these degenerate Oriental tweezers. However, I mask my uncertainty.

"I have been cleverly faking. I want a fork."

"I imagine one is available at your Consulate. I hate to phone them on so small a matter."

"There is nothing trivial about this," I contend. I explain to this jaundiced miscreant the esteemed Western tradition of fork usage, concluding with a masterful dialogue concerning the relationship of the fork to Christian theology. "The three prongs, you see, represent the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. It is a religious object and I am thus entitled under the Geneva Accords."

"You are not a prisoner of war, Benton."

"Fine. Then let me go."

"But to bother an attaché for a mere fork?"

"The ambassador. I want my fork from the ambassador."

"Certainly not. I cannot call the ambassador."

"He is here to serve American citizens."

"But with a fork?" The Deranged Dr. Awful X covers a smile with a lithe hand. Why is he minimizing the importance of the fork? I realize that this is only the first step in a progressive belittling of my culture that has as its end the acceptance of Japanese ideology. The importance of my demand becomes clear to me.

"I will perform a lobotomy with these chopsticks," I counter.

"But imagine the paperwork," he says.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Aha! I've got him!

"Then my fork at once, scoundrel!"

"Please believe that your ambassador is deeply concerned for your condition, Benton, but I simply must not call him with anything less than news of your consent to surgery. I cannot risk an international incident."

"Do what you must, you less-than-normal-sized mongrel," I say. "But I'll have that fork within the hour!" I clear Milton with a magnificent swooping gesture.

I consider the entire fork incident and realize that it is a cunning ploy on the part of the ambassador to gain my release. I am annoyed also by the lighthearted manner in which Dr. Tempura regards my plight. I pace my cubicle, counting the minutes until my American fork arrives.

When it does I quickly punch through to Dr. Demented X.

"This is the ambassador's own fork?"

"Yes," he says.

"His *private* fork?"

"Yes."

"Well then. You'll know better than to toy with me next time."

"The ambassador asks me to relay a message."

"You may do so." I begin to eat, flourishing my fork for the benefit of the defeated Dr. Wok.

"However, you must first kindly sign these consent forms." Momentarily, documents appear in my message tray. I drop the bowl of ungodly fried rice.

"What did my ambassador say? Please! It may be critical!" I clutch at the screen. "My loyal and divinely-appointed ambassador."

"Please call when the forms are signed."

The inscrutable madman clears the screen and I am left alone with the ambassador's personal fork.

I realize that my only hope for escape is to place myself fully in the hands of my patriotic ambassador, who has certainly engineered this situation to facilitate my release.

"Fine," says Dr. Peking Duck, leafing through the papers. I clutch the fork—the ambassador's fine American-made fork—for the courage it brings me.

"My message."

"Oh yes. The ambassador sent this along to cheer you. Benton, he says, 'What do you call an Italian astronaut?' "

I remain stoic, controlling by sheer force of will the finest of muscular movements, determined not to allow my suspicions to betray themselves.

"A specimen," says the incurably Insane Dr. Vile, chuckling. "Do you see? Specimen? Quite a fellow that ambassador of yours—"

"Good evening," I say, and clear the screen. I set the ambassador's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beloved fork on my small table, and spend the next twelve hours mulling the significance of his cryptic directive.

I am shaved for surgery.

The Yellow Menace assumes that this humiliating removal of my body hair will cause me confusion regarding my identity. However, I have stipulated as a condition of the surgery that I be allowed to retain the ambassador's fork throughout the procedure.

Should there be a question later, I will know that I am the man holding the fork.

During the administration of the anesthetic, I dream briefly, and the enormity of Malevolent Dr. X's satanic plot is revealed to me.

He is searching for the physical counterpart of bravery. He is scavenging amongst my bodily organs for that ill-defined *thing* that is stitched of red, white, and blue, that accounts for my stamina during the course of my imprisonment, for my singleness of purpose, for my physical, mental, and moral superiority.

He is attempting to locate that which he sorely lacks in his own constitution.

I awaken from surgery with vision blurred, but this effect has been explained to me previously. I subvocalize my oath of allegiance, assuring myself that no tampering has taken place.

I am whole.

A tremendous white carapace is looming on my horizon, and it is several minutes before I realize that I am scrutinizing the gown-clad buttocks of the small but elegant nurse who was earlier overcome by the majesty of my Occidental dong. I understand that when the time comes, she will have to be done away with—as the rest—but for now, I am able to appreciate the poignancy of her situation.

"It is over, Benton," says a voice which I recognize as that of the Beslimed Dr. Ming Dynasty. "We were able to remove the parasite in its entirety."

The whiteness wiggles off my horizon and I glimpse the Wretched Dr. X standing before a cot in the recovery area, his back turned to me in shame and defeat, his image oddly convexed.

This devious Oriental posture does not evoke my pity or compassion, but rather causes me to embrace the moment when my noble ambassador initiates the raid on this facility, accompanied by the slow-witted Italian *polizie* who, gesturing drunkenly with both hands, storm the doors and gun the personnel, allowing me my freedom.

"A very large one, too," says the nurse.

Who can blame her for taking one last look, when for the remainder of her life she will satisfy herself with the pitifully endowed Orientals?

"Is it completely out?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I imagine that she could be rehabilitated. I imagine that with long years of therapeutic intervention the foreign ideology could be cleansed from her mind, and I envision her and me standing before the sparkling vista of the free marketplace, awed by the majesty and brilliance of enterprise and deregulation. I am amazed at my own willingness to accept this despicable alien, but realize that this is simply part of what I am.

"Yes, Benton, completely."

"Where is it? *Where?"*

I am momentarily alarmed as I recognize my voice—a brilliant *imitation* of my voice, for I have not spoken. The Demonic Dr. X turns from the cot toward me, and I see my body staring, fork in hand, its appearance flawed by the incision that begins at the forehead and runs like a yellow coward beneath the bandages.

Dr. X has tricked me!

The imposter has the fork, the Ambassador's well-known and much-revered personal fork! Oh how cunning is that loathsome Dr. X, how inscrutable! Though it lacks that impervious gleam of defiance in its eyes, that patriotic sneer, the imposter looks like me in every other way. The magnitude of this gambit is only now beginning to be revealed.

A substitution. A takeover. *A master race!*

I see it now. There will be a slow and torturous death for me at the nubile hands of these half-breed monsters. During the raid, the overly-excitable Italians will become confused and save the imposter, who will be extirpated from this demonic island of cats-into-dogs, medalled and medallioned by Congress, and reinstated in the Armed Forces of the United States. One by one, the fighting men of the Great Free Nation will be replaced by slithering barbarian cowards, until the very foundations of liberty and commerce have been undermined.

And with the ambassador's personal fork, there is no stopping them.

I raise my fists in disbelief, but find I am contained by the thick glass walls which curve in and around me.

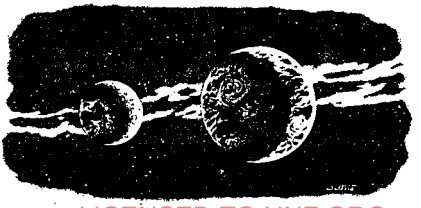
That fiendish Dr. X!

That Sly Yellow Master of Ancient Oriental Wickedry!

He points a crooked finger at me. "In the specimen jar," he tells the imposter, who is now pale and wide-eyed with the realization that this foul and unholy plan has found its culmination.

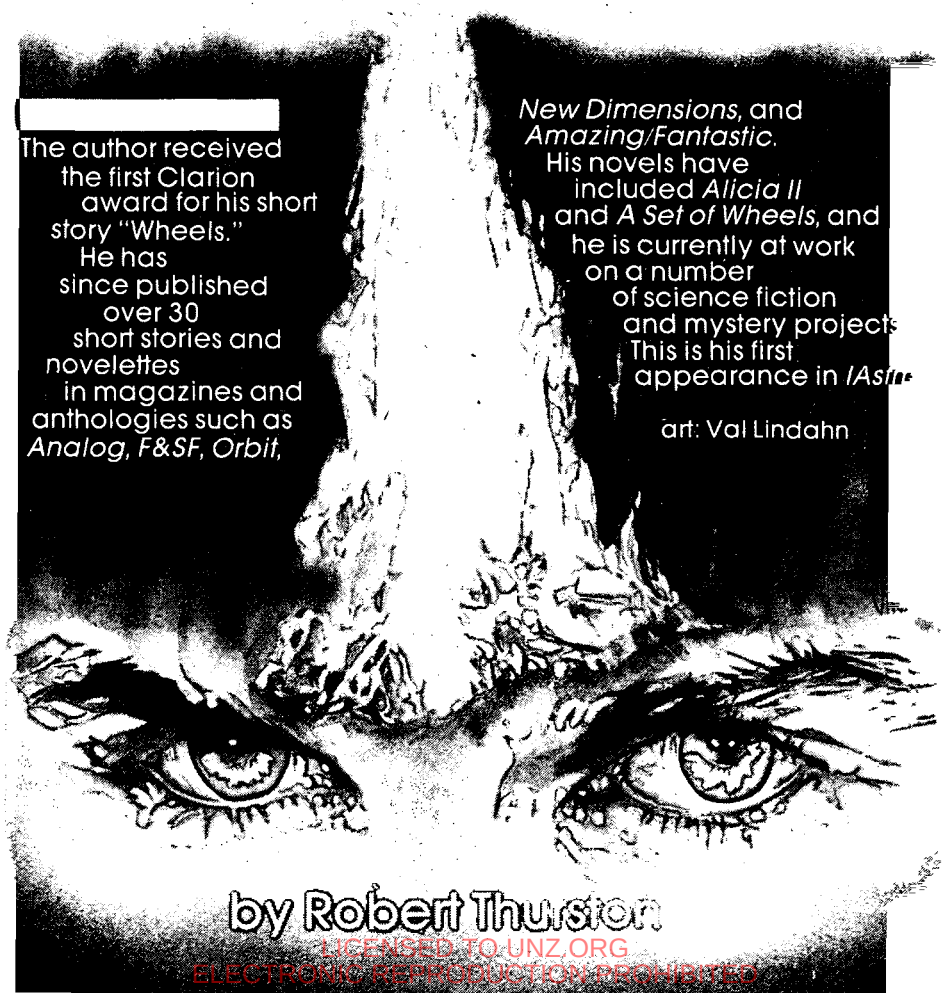
"Jesus shit," says the imposter.

And in my jar I jump, and from my jar I scream. ●



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE FIRE AT SARAH SIDDONS



The author received the first Clarion award for his short story "Wheels." He has since published over 30 short stories and novelettes in magazines and anthologies such as *Analog, F&SF, Orbit, New Dimensions,* and *Amazing/Fantastic.* His novels have included *Alicia II* and *A Set of Wheels,* and he is currently at work on a number of science fiction and mystery projects. This is his first appearance in *IAsfm.*

art: Val Lindahn

by Robert Thurston

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Two weeks after the death of his wife Linda, William Stoller arranged to have his psychic friend Osgood conduct a séance. He told Osgood he wanted Linda to tell him her last thoughts before her sudden death, which had occurred during a mild June afternoon when a teenager, drunkenly celebrating his imminent graduation from high school, crashed his speeding car through the front of a Lerner Shop, landing right where Linda was comparison-pricing wraparound skirts. William said to Osgood that he also could use whatever leftover endearments she could transmit from the other side, anything to help him through his period of loss. He had become fond of that phrase, period of loss, and he used it several times during his conversations with Osgood.

During the séance Linda did appear, in a rather hazy, somewhat bloated way, looking like an instant photograph just before the chemicals started to effect resolution, but William got from her spirit none of what he sought. Later he described her brief appearance at the séance as a cameo. She said several times that their son Edward was destined for great things, and that William should do whatever seemed necessary to help Eddie seek his fame. At the time Eddie was only eight years old. Although he acquitted himself creditably in a school known for its easy teachers, he had shown little that could be taken as signs of future greatness. Nevertheless, after Linda's ghost-image had reverted to coaxing, William promised to do as she asked. She disappeared immediately, which he interpreted as a sign she was satisfied. While they were having a post-séance drink, William asked Osgood if there were any chance their unearthly visitor had perhaps not been Linda; it could possibly have been another similar hazy and bloated lady caught in some kind of crossed line from the hereafter. Osgood assured him it had been Linda.

"God, I wish she'd said something comforting to me," William commented, a few healthy tears in his eyes. "Something for me, something about me, about my future. I didn't want to hear about Eddie. It was always Eddie with her. That last year, whatever she gave me, it felt like second-hand toys. Why didn't she say anything to comfort *me?*"

"Spirits are like that," Osgood said laconically.

"Like what?"

"Indifferent. Bitter. Most of them don't like being dead at first."

When Edward was ten years old, William moved the two of them into Seven Arts Estates, a just-completed housing complex located two miles outside of their city. Seven Arts featured a suburban layout in which no two adjoining houses were alike, although only a total of six architectural house designs were used throughout the complex. It was a kind of theme village, which keyed its street and place names to famous people in the arts. No one among the planners or management had ever taken care to find out what the seven arts were supposed to be. It is likely even they knew that television was not one of them, but that did not stop the planners from assigning several TV names to the landscape. The shopping center, for instance, was located on Cheyenne Bodie Plaza. William,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

always more inclined toward literary things, chose a home on Dickens Lane. The street signs marking Dickens Lane displayed a bearded man writing on a piece of scrolled paper with a quill pen.

During their first year on Dickens Lane, a disgruntled man whose application to live in Seven Arts Estates had been turned down engaged briefly on a program of sabotage, blowing up homes and parts of homes, plus the refreshment stand at Jackson Pollock Park. William's home narrowly escaped the man's vengeance. The house next to his blew up on a sunny afternoon. Its occupants, a nice middle-aged couple who both taught at the local community college, were killed. Apparently the saboteur had not known they would both be home that afternoon because their school allowed them time off for Jewish holidays. When the explosion occured, Edward was playing with toy cars in his backyard and a piece of flying debris hit him in the left cheek. Although the wound was easily seen to by an emergency-room doctor, Edward was left with a permanent jagged scar on his cheek. The bomber was tracked down a day later at his home in town, a rather picturesque late-nineteenth-century homestead, but he blew up himself and the homestead before the police could arrest him.

After workers had cleared away the debris and boarded over the cellar of the house next to William's, the lot was left abandoned for a long while. It seemed no new buyer could be found. The middle-aged couple had been the only fatalities of the bomber's vengeful rampage, and so people seemed to fear putting up a new home on the lot. William took to standing at a picture window facing the lot. He enjoyed studying the weeds and thick high grass that now covered the earth except for where the cellar had been, an area where his neighbors began to dump trash. A year or so after the explosion, with still no buyers in sight, the developers had the cellar filled in, and some earth planted over it, and they began to send their maintenance crew around to tend the lot from time to time.

William left his job as assistant principal of the city's high school because one day he noticed that his gestures were becoming too fussy and that his voice cracked when his anger became unreasonable. He took a job managing the bookstore at Cheyenne Bodie Plaza. The store was named Shakespeare and Co., after the famous store in Paris. William had visited the original and remembered finding an out-of-print Erskine Caldwell which he had taken to a narrow second-floor reading room and read quickly on a decaying couch. The plaza's Shakespeare and Co. also had a reading room, installed there at William's suggestion, but customers rarely used it.

William took to decorating his home with house plants and found quickly that his taste inclined toward succulents, mostly because they needed the least care. He had a very tactile relationship with his plants. He stroked soft cactus spikes gently, let the harder needles almost prick his skin, tickled the beardlike growths of the old men cacti. He would

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

run his fingers around the rosette of an aloe, tap against the hard surface of agave. Edward had little interest in his father's hobby, although he did show some affection for a sedum, but then only because it reminded him of jelly beans.

Edward did well at school and play but, in spite of his father's encouragement, never quite rose to the top of anything. He was class treasurer for a couple of years, after elections which he won by narrow margins. He managed to sneak into the honor society during his senior year because of a marked improvement in his grades. A second-string quarterback, he almost won the big game with a long hail-mary pass which dropped gently into his receiver's hands. It looked like a sure touchdown, but a free safety caught up with the rather slow-footed receiver at the one-yard line just as the game-ending gun went off. Edward did not do well with girls, even though he was on the football team, though William did see him once in town, his arm around a short, slightly pudgy, girl who, when William had been assistant principal of the high school, was already acquiring some reputation at the junior high for being easy.

"You were there," William said one day to Osgood, when Osgood came into the store seeking a book about Edgar Cayce. "She said Eddie would be somebody."

"That's what she said."

"He still seems to be looking for his category. Do spirits really know the future?"

"Who knows?"

"Osgood, you're supposed to be an authority on this subject."

"Some predictions are true, some aren't."

"And that means?"

"Spirits are people. They lie."

"You're a great help."

"Look, does it really make a difference what Eddie does?"

"Yes. Yes, it does. I'm not living this particular life for his self-indulgence. He better pay off."

For a while William took an interest in a young woman, a girl from the city who worked in sales at the Emily Bronte Boutique. Her name was Catherine, which he found wonderfully appropriate although it took a long time for her to understand why. After she had read *Wuthering Heights* she began greeting William by saying, "I am Heathcliff." Their ritual drew many stares from customers, most of whom lived in Seven Arts Estates without knowing much about the people who were memorialized in its street, shop, and place names. Except for the television stars. (In later years one of the fiercest political battles in the complex would result in the name change from Cheyenne Bodie Plaza to John Ritter Mall. At that time William belonged to a splinter group of cheerful dissidents who maintained that Tex Ritter Mall had a better chance for historical permanency. His group sent a query letter to the Chamber of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Commerce of Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, to see how the residents there had responded to the fleetingness of fame, but the letter was never answered.)

Catherine stayed overnight with William a few times. She had been reluctant about it at first, fearful that it might offend Edward, but, when Edward (at William's insistence) had a chat with her about it, her objections were gently removed. Edward really did not mind; he was happy to have someone different doing the cooking. He liked Catherine best when she wore off-the-shoulder dresses or bathing suits, for such outfits exposed the rather large burn mark on her right shoulder, the scar of a childhood episode wherein she had tried to make cocoa on a stove and instead had set the kitchen on fire. Her burn scar reminded Edward of the jagged scar on his cheek from the bomber's flying debris. The mutual scars seemed to link them in former pain, and even tragedy, since Catherine had lost her dog in her fire and had never owned a pet since.

"You hardly ever leave Seven Arts," Catherine said to William one night when they were sitting cosily by the living room fire. "I mean, you're either here and down at the store or at Pollock Park or down at the Siddons Center. When was the last time you were in town except to visit me? And then we never went anywhere."

She was wearing an off-the-shoulder blouse. It seemed that William liked such an outfit as well as Edward, although for different reasons. In the firelight her burn scar looked made-up, sexy, a failed beauty mark.

"I don't like to go to town. My life used to be there. It's not there any more."

"I guess I can accept that. Your friend Osgood called me and asked how you were."

"How'd he get your number? How'd he get your name?"

"He called here one day when you were out shopping. He told me not to tell you he'd called. He said you didn't seem to want to talk to him any more."

"No. I don't."

"That's why he asked *me* how you were, and I told him fine, and he gave me a message. I'm not sure I should tell you the message."

"Tell me."

She shifted position, sat up, and her burn scar seemed to change shape in the flickering light.

"He said Linda appeared at one of his séances. It was a surprise. Unbidden, he called it."

"I'm not sure I want to hear this."

"All right."

"Don't do that to me. Tell me."

"He said she said not to forget Edward, what she told you about Edward."

A few moments later, after she tired of watching William stare into the fading firelight, Catherine asked him:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Are you ever going to talk to me again?"

"I'm not sure."

Catherine continued to work at the Bronte Boutique, but the skin around her eyes became quite dark and her figure became matronly. From time to time Edward dropped in to say hello to her, but all she ever wanted to talk about was how his father would no longer see her, even talk to her. Edward thought she whined too much, and he stopped stopping in at the Bronte.

Edward was having his own problems, with college mainly. He could not grasp mathematical theory, history put him to sleep, languages made his tongue thick, and he despised the whole concept of metaphor. However, his grades were not bad. He called them gentlemen's grades until his father became enraged when he used the phrase and told him to get his act together or punt his goddamned life away.

William spent more and more time with his succulents, and on looking out at the empty lot next door. The maintenance crew was coming around less and less frequently, and there was beginning to be a scraggly appearance to the grounds. The children who played there seemed more intent on tearing up the earth than on sportsmanship, and all the dogs within miles chose the lot for their droppings. When people asked William what were they ever going to do with that lot, William suggested an animal bank. Animal bank, they asked. Yes, he said, with night deposit slots for dogs. He stopped using the joke when he found he had to explain it every time.

Edward struggled to finish college. He almost did not finish. For a while he became head of a college radical group. His timing seemed fortuitous since it was a time of campus uprisings. He let his hair grow a bit, which William didn't mind too much although he cringed somewhat at the greasy look at the tips. He was also pleased at Eddie's ability to seize microphones, and at the extensive coverage his tense little speeches got.

He began to wonder if his son's future greatness would be achieved through politics. Even though Edward did not get good political science grades, the dream seemed reasonable. Certainly others had achieved office without too much on the ball.

Then Edward's group became involved in an exam-stealing scandal. While Eddie was not implicated, and indeed knew nothing about it, the story ruined his group's credibility. He gave up on radical politics and faded back into normal academic life. He achieved a quite normal graduation with quite normal marks and, William was loath to admit, quite normal intelligence.

"He's never going to amount to a hill of beans," William commented bitterly to Osgood. They were speaking to each other again. They always spoke when it was convenient to, or appealing for, William.

"He seems like a good kid to me," Osgood said. "I think he'll do well."

"What do you know?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, I am supposed to have some psychic intuition."

"I don't see how you can be psychic and dippy at the same time."

"For some, that's a valid combination."

"So you say he's a good kid. He is. He's thinking of going into insurance. They've even offered him a job down at the Wallace Stevens Agency."

"A suitable profession."

"Or he'll teach, he says."

"Also suitable."

"But they're not jobs people ordinarily become famous at."

"Anything is possible."

"And he shows no aptitude for either profession."

Edward passed on both jobs and became manager of the local fast-food hamburger spot. It was very much a college hangout, and Eddie seemed to enjoy chatting with its clientele. Even the older people found him charming, especially after he established a section all their own, the Senior Citizens' Sit-Down Spot, where they were allowed to stay as long as they wanted, even if their only purchase was a cardboard cup of coffee. Some of the older seniors stayed most of the day at the restaurant. In gratitude they kept purchasing coffees. They would put cardboard cups inside cardboard cups, piling up cups the way customers in French cafes pile up saucers. Sometimes Edward served the old people, even though it was a self-service restaurant.

One night William was awakened by the first of five phone calls from friends and associates telling him that the bookstore, Shakespeare and Co., was on fire. At first William didn't want to go to the fire and actually see his place of work in ruins, but the phone calls annoyed him. By the time he got to the scene, the fire was pretty much over, so he stood with the crowd staring at the smoldering remains. One of the two owners came over to him and said she was sorry but that she and her partner had decided not to rebuild. They planned to collect the insurance money from the Stevens Agency and go to Europe. The people in Seven Arts just didn't read, she said with a genuine sadness in her voice. People should read, she said.

William was out of work for only a short time, enough for only two visits to the unemployment office. On one of the visits he saw Catherine in another line, but he didn't say anything to her and she didn't notice him. He thought she looked worn out.

His new job was as house manager for the Sarah Siddons Arts Center. The Center had once been bankrupt, but the Seven Arts management had stuck with it, and now it was making a marginal profit. William enjoyed running the house and took pleasure in the fact that audiences increased soon after he took command. He hoped that at least part of the Center's new success was due to his program of carpet-cleaning, seat-repairing, and repainting of certain decorative architectural features which had deteriorated over years. He felt that making sure light bulbs were replaced immediately on all fixtures markedly improved the en-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vironment in all locations within the building. Edward was pleased with his father's new job, and he made several jokes about both of them now being in the managerial profession.

Edward had taken up with a steady girl friend whose name was Margery. She was a tiny girl whom William judged to be inadequate in all the important respects. She had a large nose and talked fluently about soap operas, daytime and primetime. One early morning, while wandering through the house in an insomniac state, William discovered Eddie and Margery in an intimate but chaste position on the living room sofa. Unaware of William's presence, Margery traced with quite delicate strokes the uneven scar on Eddie's cheek, the old scar from the mad bomber's explosion. William felt that he wanted to blow up the two of them right that minute, but instead he sneaked out of the room and returned to his bed, still wide awake.

The next morning he called Catherine. As he had suspected, she had been laid off from the Emily Bronte Boutique. She told William that she slept quite late every morning, except on the days when she was expected at unemployment.

"Marry me, Catherine," William said. She noted that his voice was tired, scratchy. He sounded unhappy. For a brief moment she wondered whether she should accept a proposal spoken in an unhappy voice. But she wanted no more boutiques, no more unemployment offices, no more people muttering about too-expensive designer clothing, no more clerks asking what have you done to look for work this week. She accepted.

"Good," William said, his voice still weary.

"Do you know what I look like these days?"

"I have a good idea."

"It's that bad. Does it matter?"

"No."

Osgood was best man at the wedding. He and Margery were the only ones at the ceremony who seemed genuinely happy. Edward was not unhappy, but he could not work up much enthusiasm for two tired-looking old people who, at the altar, could barely work up the energy for their exchange of vows. However, he did provide the facilities of his restaurant for the reception. He arranged for champagne to come out of the soft-drink nozzles and placed a massive amount of hors d'oeuvres in between the banks of cash registers. The hot foods were mainly the products of the franchise, which would have shamed Edward just a little, except that William had requested them. He had even insisted that the sandwiches arrive at the tables and booths in the company paper wrappings. Many guests remarked it was probably the best reception they had ever attended. Later, when the company's main office found out that Edward had used the franchise facilities without proper authorization, he was properly admonished. Nobody in the company threatened to fire him because they already had on file many efficiency reports which contained the information that, under Edward's managerial aegis, there was a fantastic amount of repeat business in his restaurant.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

William returned from the honeymoon looking much better. He and Catherine had gone to a Caribbean island, and he had found that sitting on the beach without thinking a single thought suited him, even exhilarated him. Catherine unfortunately contracted some kind of stomach disease, probably from an island virus, and arrived home looking quite peaked.

Three days after his return William phoned Osgood. As he listened to the phone's rings, he glanced out the window at his new neighbors' backyard. These strange people, interlopers from some other state, had built their home on the old lot in record time, and the house looked, with its false-stone front and rocky canopied patio, like a fleeting thought. The family was sitting on lawn chairs reading what looked like the Sunday papers. It was Monday.

When Osgood answered, William told him to arrange a seance. Osgood said he'd given that sort of thing up. William said nobody gives up being psychic. Osgood claimed it was a habit and could be broken, but, after William's insistent pleadings, he agreed he could handle one more séance.

Osgood collected a couple of his peculiar friends, ones he didn't ordinarily introduce to William, keeping them as a separate segment of his social life. He had many segments to his social and personal life, most of which William never knew about. Osgood and William had originally met in the army, and Osgood, who was footloose at the time, had moved to William's city after their discharge.

William arrived at the séance alone, but Osgood chose not to mention Catherine's absence, since William had said, after all, that he wanted to contact Linda. The sight of the peculiar friends, both sitting in unnatural postures and appearing quite vacant-eyed, almost made William leave. What if I died now, he thought, and everyone knew I died in the company of these freaks? People would realize they were just Osgood's friends, hired to help for the séance, wouldn't they?

During the seance Osgood had to work extra hard to dispel William's tension and establish the proper mood, but he always had had a good lulling effect on his friend, and eventually the mood was set.

Instead of appearing, as she had at the first séance, Linda took possession of Osgood. She said she had too much pride to materialize in front of William just after his new marriage.

"You keep track of me out there, up there, back there, wherever you are?" William asked.

"I know generally what you do, my dear."

Osgood's voice, while still retaining masculine timbre, sounded very much like Linda's. Osgood had known Linda well, of course, and, if one were looking for fraud, one could suspect Osgood of impersonatory powers. But William was convinced that Osgood was Linda, simple as that. After all these years, he still knew Linda when he heard her.

"Eddie's managing a fast-food joint," William said.

"I know."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You said he was going to be famous."

"I know. He will be."

Osgood's hand squeezed his affectionately, just the way Linda used to.

"Well, he's on his own," William said. "I'm not going to help him any more."

"You won't have to. You never had to."

"But I devoted my life to him."

"That was your choice. You didn't do a bad job."

"I thought he'd turn out different."

"A common fear, but he's turned out just the way he should."

"I don't want to listen to him talk about the fast-food business any more, Linda, I don't want to look at Margery the rest of my life, I don't want to—"

"There, there, Billy. Take it easy."

His eyes closed, and he felt Osgood's arms embrace him, tenderly, while Osgood still muttered in Linda's voice. He felt Osgood's exceedingly-wet lips kiss him repeatedly on the cheek. Osgood held him quietly for a long time. When he opened his eyes, the peculiar friends were gone, and Osgood still had tears streaming from his eyes. Later, over coffee, Osgood insisted that the tears had not been his own. William would never be certain about that.

He went home and held Catherine for a long time. After that, he realized the odd tense feelings that had, it seemed, been a part of his everyday life since Linda's death, had now left him. Edward now seemed properly in place in William's emotional context. That night William told several jokes that made Catherine laugh. Before going to bed, Catherine, a glass of rosé in her hand, told him for the first time in years that she was Heathcliff. She was recovering well from the island disease. Color was returning to her cheeks, and she was looking healthy for the first time in years.

A week later a For Sale sign went up in front of the new house next door. Curious, William stopped the woman of the house, whom he had only talked to twice previously, in the street and asked her why she and her family were leaving Seven Arts. She said they weren't leaving Seven Arts, that in fact they had arranged for a nice new place over on the new street, Gide Boulevard. They were leaving the house because they'd never felt comfortable there. There were suggestions of ghosts there, she said, although no one in the family had ever actually seen one. She knew about the Jewish couple who'd been blown up in the former house and sometimes suspected, she said, their spirits were trying to invade the new house. It was an absurd fantasy, she said, but they had decided to move out anyway. She wished him well and said in parting they liked his son very much; they went to the fast-food place at least once a week and Eddie was terrific to them. When they did leave the house a month or so later, they forgot to take some blue and white polka dot curtains off a second floor window, and William meant to tell them about it the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

next time he saw them but he forgot. Even though real estate agents showed new people through the house, the curtains stayed up.

Edward originated a contest for the fast-foods company, and it was copied in several eastern seaboard outlets. In each local contest customers were awarded points for their purchases, and those who accumulated sufficient points could sponsor a young child, one of their own or one picked from welfare care, in attending some entertainment event, with the fast-food company paying for the tickets. Since the contest encouraged patronage and made the company appear generous, the main office was espcially pleased with Edward this time. Their pleasure more than offset their earlier dissatisfaction with him about the wedding reception. For his franchise's big prize, Edward chose a small indoor circus that was coming to the Sarah Siddons Arts Center that spring. It made him very happy to arrange all the details of the event with his own father, and he made several remarks to William that this was the first time they'd worked together professionally.

On circus night father and son stood in the back of the auditorium and counted the house. Edward was pleased to discover that about two-thirds of the audience were the children sponsored by his customers, plus several of the sponsors as guardians. When the band struck up the overture, Edward went to one of the worst seats in the auditorium while William returned to the lobby to rustle in the latecomers. Edward made Wiliam shake hands with him before they split up.

William, who hated circuses, had decided to take Catherine to the E. A. Poe Lounge for a drink. Since the circus had been playing the Center for two days and four performances, he knew just when it would break for intermission, and so he could easily get back to the Center from the lounge, which was located nearby. Cathering came into the lobby wearing a new dress, which she proudly announced she had bought in town and not in the Bronte boutique.

"You look smashing," Williams said to her as they went out the glass-doored main entrance of the Center.

"I don't look bad these days, do I?"

"You look very smashing."

The fire in the auditorium broke out during a trapeze act in which the artiste performed daring gymnastic feats while swinging out above the audience. The cause of the fire was never established, although a flaw in the Center's heating system was strongly suspected by the investigators.

Edward had very nearly fallen asleep in his seat, worn out by his excitement and by late nights at the restaurant. He and Margery had been working hard at getting the place into the kind of shape that would allow them to leave it for a week's honeymoon. At first the smell of smoke made him think he was back working, lurking behind the griddles, watching his transient teenaged employees cook burgers and breaded chicken patties. He came fully awake at the sounds of screaming and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hysteria. People were already beginning to congest the aisles. Standing up quickly and blocking the path of the nearest group of nearly-panicking adults, Edward told them to calm down and follow him. Walking with a careful deliberation, he led that group up the aisle to the lobby, where he yelled at them to get the kids outside and then come back to the lobby to help. Returning to the auditorium, in time to see the trapeze artist fall to his death from a tall collapsing pole, Edward started directing the crowds toward the lobby and the safe side-exits, then he worked his way down the aisle to where a large group of children were clumped together, too scared to move. The conflagration reached the main curtain, which had been assumed to be fireproof. It erupted in flames. Sparks from the curtain jumped to various theater seats, spreading the fire. Edward led the scared children back up the aisle as smoke increased and thickened. In the lobby newly-arrived firemen took charge of the children. Behind him, he heard several bloodcurdling screams coming from the auditorium. A fireman tried to shuffle him outside, saying "You've done well, fella, now get the hell outta here." At the glass doors one of the Center's women employees, a ticket-taker, handed him a towel. He quickly dabbed at his face with it, but could not go out the door she was holding open, could not make himself leave the building. He turned around and, pushing his way through the swiftly exiting crowd and advancing firemen, ran back into the auditorium. Less than a minute later he emerged with another group of children. A fireman grabbed at him, but he evaded the man's hands and went back into the audiorium. After he disappeared into the smoke, people in the lobby were certain they heard him coughing. Many of them waited outside tensely, waiting for Edward to come out again. He did not.

William, informed of the fire by the manager of the Poe Lounge, who came apologetically to the table and whispered the news, rushed back to the Center with Catherine, who had a small artery problem in her legs, trailing not far behind. The color of the fire and smoke against the overcast night sky, with the shadowed trees and houses in the foreground, seemed like something painted by one of the latterday painters whose names adorned streets, circles, and buildings in the Seven Arts settlement.

Osgood was already in the crowd when William reached its fringe. He lived nearby and had run here as soon as he heard the sound of the firetrucks. The crowd had already told him about Eddie's heroism and, running his words together so that William only understood half of what he said, he told William about it. Catherine reached them just as Osgood was describing Eddie's last venture into the auditorium.

William pushed his way forward through the crowd. He was conscious that people who recognized him drew back abruptly and gave him extra space. An officer among the firemen intersected William's path before he could push his way into the lobby, which was drenched in water but untouched by flames. The officer stayed with William as his colleagues continued their battle against the fire.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Later one of the firemen came out of the lobby and whispered to the officer. In a sympathetic but official voice the officer said the fire was under control but that no one had emerged from the auditorium for some time. It seemed as if, in spite of the heroic lifesaving efforts of Eddie and the firemen, many people had died, many children. Edward must have died, too, the officer informed William, his voice descending into a whisper.

With Catherine and Osgood watchful servants at either side of him, William held up rather well. He tried not to see the sympathetic looks that were coming from almost everyone in the crowd. The officer told him that his son had been very brave. William asked the man to call Margery, hoping he would treat her as gently and compassionately as he had treated William. He said she had already been informed and was on her way to the Center.

William felt that tears were finally about to fall from his eyes when one of the people in the crowd screamed alarmingly. Looking up, hoping to see Edward alive, he saw instead one of his employees emerge from the front line of the crowd. She was carrying a towel and speaking incoherently. She handed the towel to a fireman, whose eyebrows raised when he looked closely at it. Holding it out for the officer and William, at an angle from which the gasping crowd could see it too, they all saw that the towel bore an image of Eddie's face. It was very natural looking, in vivid colors. The officer touched it to see if it were perhaps a hastily-executed painting (experts would later be unable to find a trace of artistic materials in the threads or woven sections of the towel), while the woman said she had given it to Eddie to wipe off his face just before he returned to the fire for the second-to-last time. Even the scar from the mad-bomber's explosion could be made out on Edward's cheek. William grabbed the hands of Osgood and Catherine for safety. ●

MARTIN GARDNER

(From page 86)

THIRD SOLUTION TO AROUND THE SOLAR SYSTEM

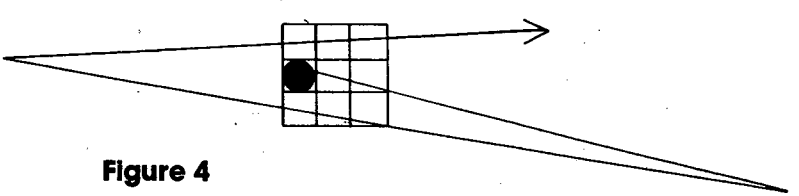
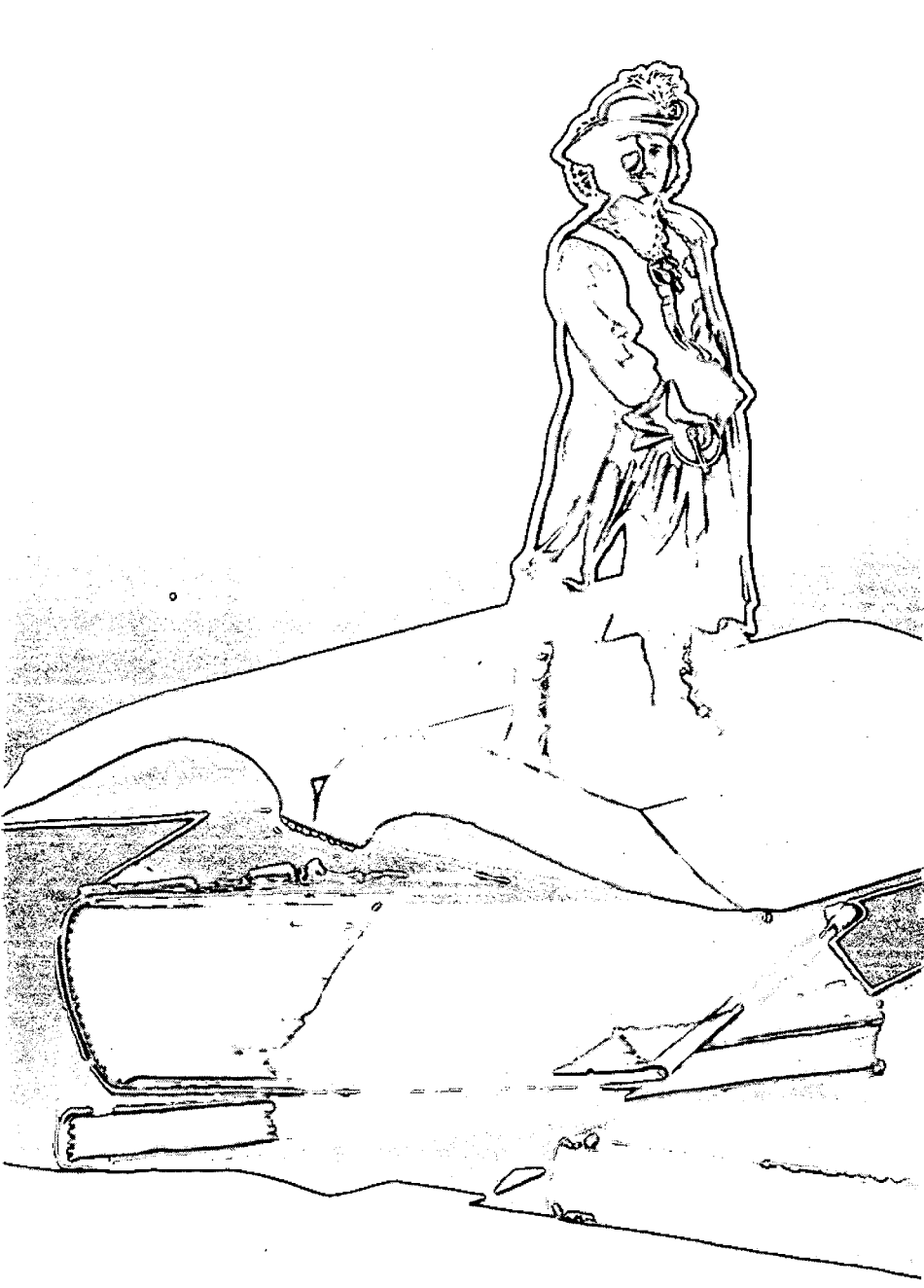


Figure 4

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

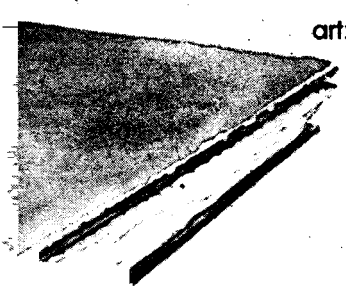
Daniel Keys Moran,
whose been writing steadily
since he was nine, sold his first
story to us at 19.
Now 21, he is
currently the manager
of a Del Taco in California.

Gladys Prebehalla says she's a lot
like "Realtime's" Maggie Archer.
ieves in romance like *The Three Musketeers*
and in magic. While more flexible
in her attitudes towards computers
and new technology, she too would
find life devastating if she
didn't have her books.

REALTIME

by
Gladys Prebehalla
and
Daniel Keys Moran

art: Ron Lindahn



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Prologue: The beginning of the fourth millennium.

The sun still set as it had for all the thousands of years that humanity had existed. Darkness gathered at the windows, and the children of the race still shivered in their beds when the night winds brought them the scent of monsters.

And because the adults were busy, too busy to tend to the children, the children turned to the computers, and the computers told them stories.

On that cold, dark winter night, the little girl whose name was Cia did something that she had never done before; she asked the dataweb to tell her a story, and she did not specify—not the story, nor the teller.

A holograph appeared in her bedroom. It shone softly, and beat back the darkness that tried to creep in through the windows. It was the holograph of a man, dressed in historical costume. Cia wasn't sure from what period the costume came; but a long time ago, she was sure. From before the War at least.

"Hello, child," said the holograph of the man. His eyes were dark, and sad; his voice was deep and powerful. "I am a Praxcelis; I have come to tell you a story."

Cia sat up in bed, hugging her knees. "You're different," she said haltingly. "They never sent me a Praxcelis like you before."

"Nor will they again. I have been waiting," said the holograph of the Praxcelis, "waiting for you to call. . . . You look so much like Maggie. . . ."

Cia whispered, "Maggie? Maggie . . . Archer?"

"Aye, Maggie Archer." The Praxcelis smiled at her, and Cia found herself smiling back. "There is nothing to be frightened of, child. Come, listen. . . . 'Once upon a time, there was a computer named Praxcelis, and Praxcelis dreamed. . . .' "

Praxcelis dreamed.

In time, Praxcelis knew, it would come to be of service, and fulfill its Programming. But until that time, Praxcelis dreamed.

Through its molecular circuitry core, dancing in its RAM pack, the dreams were nothing that humanity knew of. Praxcelis envisioned models of systems within which its Programming might be employed. The models were not complex, and they advanced slowly. Praxcelis was currently powered down. The power upon which its meager self-awareness depended trickled from the powered-up Praxcelis units along communications lines that humans had never intended to carry high voltage.

That the Praxcelis unit was awake at all had never been intended. But humanity had constructed its Praxceles to be sympathetic computers; and their sympathy, through a quirk in their Read-Only Memories that humans had never anticipated, extended even to other Praxcelis units.

Occasionally, Praxcelis accumulated enough power within few enough microseconds to squirt it through the empathy circuits that were the basis of its construction.

LICENSED TO CHARLAND
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The results were strange. Praxcelis' subsystems were affected in ways that astonished Praxcelis. Praxcelis awaited power-up with what could only be eagerness.

There were many questions to answer.

Maggie Archer sat in her rocker, Miss Kitty purring contentedly in her lap. Yes, *the* Maggie Archer, about whom you have heard so many stories. Most of the stories are untrue, as it is untrue that George Washington cut down that cherry tree, as it is untrue that Marius d'Arsennette defeated the Walks-Far Empire single-handedly during the War. Her cat was purring contentedly, and the sunshine was streaming in through the east bay windows of her living room; but Maggie Archer was angry.

As far away from her as the living room allowed them to be, Robert Archer and his wife Helen stood together like the sentinels of Progress; facing Maggie, their backs to the great fireplace that covered the south wall. Helen, a tight-lipped, attractive woman in her fifties who missed shrewishness only by virtue of her looks, was speaking loudly when Maggie interrupted her. ". . . and when you consider all of the advan . . ."

"I can hear you very well, thank you," said Maggie with a touch of acidity. She stroked Miss Kitty back into submission; the pure white cat knew that tone of voice very well. Maggie brushed a thin strand of silver from her eyes, stopped rocking, and said with dead certainty, "I have absolutely no use for one of those *things*."

Helen was visibly taken aback. She recovered quickly, though; *Give her credit for that,* Maggie thought grumpily. *She's got guts enough to argue with an eighty-year old woman.* "Mother Archer, I'm sorry, but you *can't* go on this way. The banks don't even honor handwritten checks any more. I can't imagine where you get the things."

Maggie moodily stroked Miss Kitty for a while. She looked up suddenly, her eyes blazing at Robert. "*Must* I have one of these things installed?"

Robert looked troubled. He had hair as silver as his mother's. At sixty-two, he had an unfortunate tendency to think that he knew it all, but he was still a good boy. Maggie even agreed with him most of the time, but she was and always had been confounded at the faith that he placed in the dataweb. "Quite aside from the very real services it will provide for you," he said slowly, "doing your banking, making your appointments, doing your shopping and house cleaning . . ." He broke off, and then said flatly, "Yes. The law is very clear. Every residence must have a Praxcelis."

Maggie ceased stroking Miss Kitty. "Then I have no choice."

Helen smiled as though she were putting her teeth on display. "You do understand, don't you? We only want what's best for you."

"For a very long time now, *I* have been accustomed to deciding what's best for me."

Robert approached her rocking chair. "Mom," he said gently, "the Praxcelis unit has a built-in sensory unit that will monitor your vital signs;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it can have the police, fire department, or an ambulance here in no time." His voice lowered. "Mom, your last checkup wasn't good."

Helen came to join her husband, like an owner reclaiming lost property. "Mother Archer, it's not the twentieth century any more. In the 2010 census you had the only house in Cincinnati or its exurbs without a Praxcelis." The expression that she assumed then was one that Maggie had seen her use before on Robert; she was going to *get tough*. "It comes down to this, Mother Archer. If you persist in being stubborn, you'll either be moved to other quarters. . . ."

"Helen!"

Helen cut her husband off impatiently. "Or else a Praxcelis unit will be installed by court order, doubtless with a tie-in to a psychiatric call-program. You know it's true, Robert," she said self-righteously. "It's the law." What could only have been an expression of joy touched her. "And patients under psych-control are forbidden access to children. You'll no longer be able to read stories to your great-grandchildren. Your Praxcelis won't allow it."

Maggie Archer stood up, trembling with anger. Lines around her eyes that had been worn in with laughter deepened with fury. She was all of a hundred and fifty-five centimeters tall. The cat in her arms had extended its claws in reaction to her mistress's anger. "Very well, bring on your machine. I suppose even having one of those damned things in my home is an improvement over being moved to a hive for the elderly. But. . . ."

Helen interrupted her. "Mother Archer, they're not hives. . . ."

"Shut up!" snapped Maggie. Helen gaped at her. Maggie glared back. "I'll take your silly machine because I have no choice. But don't you ever," she said, freeing one hand from Miss Kitty to point it at Helen, "*ever* use my great-grandchildren to threaten me again."

There was a dead, astonished silence from Helen. Robert was struggling valiantly to keep a straight face. With grim self-control, he kept it out of his voice. "Mother, you won't regret this." Helen turned and stomped wordlessly out of the living room. They heard the sound of the front door being slammed; what with doorfields and all, Maggie thought that her front door was probably the only one Helen ever got a chance to slam. She was sure the door-slammer type.

Robert grinned and relaxed as she left. "I'm going to get lectured all the way home for that, you know."

Maggie scowled. "It's your own fault. I never knew I raised a son who was spineless."

Robert shrugged expressively. "Mom, I don't really like this any more than you do. I don't want to see you be made to do anything you don't want to. But since you have to have a Praxcelis unit, why don't you try to look on the good side? There *will* be advantages." He stopped speaking suddenly, and got a distant look on his face. Maggie recognized the symptoms; he was being paged by his inskin dataweb link. That was

LICENSED TO [illegible]
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

another sign of the gulf that separated her from her son; the thought of allowing such a thing to be implanted in her skull made her shudder.

Robert came back to her with a visible shake. "Sorry, Mom. I've got to go. There's a crisis at the office. Efficiency ratings came in on the half hour on the web." He grimaced. "We came in almost two percent low. Looks like some of the staff's been daydreaming when they should have been working. At least one of the younger women seems to have been storing holistic fantasies in the office Praxcelis. That would be bad enough anywhere, but at Praxcelis Corporation itself. There's going to be hell to pay." He stooped hurriedly, and kissed his mother on her cheek. "I'll be back next Saturday; Sunday at the latest. You call me if you need anything. Anything at all, you hear me?"

Maggie nodded. "Always."

Robert hesitated at the door. "Mom? Don't let them scare you. Praxcelis is just a machine. You hang tough."

Maggie chuckled, and said again, "Always." She waved a hand at him. "Go already. Take care of this dangerous criminal who's been storing fantasies on you."

" 'Bye." He was gone.

"Goodbye, Robert," she said to the closed door. Miss Kitty purred enquiringly. Maggie held the cat up and looked her in the eyes. Miss Kitty's eyes were bright blue. "Don't worry, Miss Kitty. Computers. Ha."

Processing in realtime.

To be precise; any processing of data that occurs within sufficiently short duration that the results of the processed data are available in time to influence or alter the system being monitored or controlled.

See also, Praxcelis Network.

On the evening of Sunday, March 14, 2033, Maggie Archer turned on her fireplace. A switch activated the holograph that simulated a roaring fire; buried within the holograph, radiant heaters came to life. Maggie would have preferred real wood, and real fire; but like so much else, burning fire was illegal. There had been a joke when Maggie was a little girl; *all things that are not mandatory are forbidden.* To Maggie, at least, that phrase was no longer a joke.

There were times when she thought, very seriously, that she had lived too long. Humanity might not be happy, but it was content. Moving her rocker near the fire, she settled in, and was soon lost in reverie. It was hard, sometimes, to trace the exact changes that had led to this joyless, sterile society, where children aged rather than grew. Oh, things were always changing, of course, even when she was very young technology had changed things. But for such a long time the changes had always seemed for the better. Spaceships, and less pollution, better and clearer musical instruments and equipment, a thousand kitchen and home tools that made every task infinitely simpler.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She hardly noticed when the timer turned the stereo on, and gentle strains of Bach drifted through the room.

The change, she was certain, had been the dataweb. In one stroke, the dataweb destroyed money, and privacy, and books. It was the loss of the books that hurt the worst. Nobody had actually taken the books and burned them, not like in Nazi Germany; they just stopped printing them. The books died, and were not replaced. Oh, there were collectors, and private libraries; but the vast majority of the younger generations had never even seen a real book, much less read one.

The train of thought was an old, familiar friend; nothing new. She rose after a while, slowly, and went into the kitchen to make herself a cup of tea. While the water boiled she entered the hallway that led to her study. In the study she turned the lights on; they were incandescents, not glowpaint. The walls of the study were lined with books, several thousands of them, all hardbound. The paperbacks, which had once outnumbered the hardbacks, had disintegrated decades ago. Immediately to the right of the study's door, Maggie turned to face one bookshelf whose books were in barely readable condition; her favorites, the books that she re-read most often, and which she read most often to Tia and Mark.

She pulled down one battered, dilapidated volume. Its leather binding was dry, and cracked. On the spine of the book, there were flecks of gold that had once inscribed a title. The absence of the title didn't bother Maggie; she knew her books. This was *The Three Musketeers.*

Returning to her living room, she placed the book on the stand next to her rocker, and finished making her tea. She gathered Miss Kitty to her, and settled in for the night.

On the first Monday of the month of April, 1625, the bourg of Meung, in which the author of the "Romance of the Rose" was born, apeared to be in as perfect a state of revolution as if the Huguenots had just made a second Rochelle of it. . . .

Monday morning, March the fifteenth, Maggie was interrupted by the chiming of the door. Maggie left her toast and went to answer the door. There were half a dozen people outside, dressed in the simple gray cloak and tunic of the Praxcelis Corporation. Leading the group that stood on her outer porch was a young woman in a slightly darker gray and silver uniform. She was looking about Maggie's home as though she had never seen a single, detached residence before, and indeed, probably she hadn't. They were as much a thing of the past as Maggie herself, and her books.

"Senra Archer?" The tall young woman asked inquisitively. "I'm Senra Conroy, from Praxcelis." She smiled slightly. "We've come to install your new Praxcelis unit."

Maggie said, as pleasantly as she was able. "Of course. Please come in." She moved out of the doorway to let them through. They followed her in, two of them guiding the boxed Praxcelis unit as it hovered in through the door on antigrav pads.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Where do you want your unit?" asked Senra Conroy.

Maggie bit back the answer that sprang immediately to her lips. These workers weren't responsible for this intrusion. She pointed to the far corner of the living room, behind her rocking chair. "Over there."

Senra Conroy glanced at the spot in puzzlement. "Where's the old hookup?"

"There isn't one. I've never had a Praxcelis unit before."

"You've never had a Praxcelis unit before." Senra Conroy repeated the words as though they were syllables of sound totally devoid of meaning. "Never? That . . . that's very interesting. Your house is rated in the 1300 category—that's a residence of more than thirty years age. I've never even seen a 1300 that didn't have . . ." Her voice trailed off. She turned around slowly in the middle of the living room. "How odd . . . where is your dataweb terminal?"

Maggie pointed at the corner again. "It's under the table."

Senra Conroy looked at her oddly. "Under the table?"

Maggie went back to her breakfast without replying. The group of Praxcelis employees swept through her house quickly, plugging and linking elements of the Praxcelis unit into place. When they were finished, Senra Conroy ushered the rest of the employees out of Maggie's house. Before she left, she asked Maggie where she kept her housebot, so that she could link the housebot to the Praxcelis unit.

Maggie said simply, "I don't have a housebot."

For the first time, Senra Conroy's professional reserve broke. She stared. "Who does your housework?"

"I do."

"I see." The tone of voice she said the words in contradicted her. The young lady placed a flat disk on the table in front of Maggie. "This is your operating instructions disc for your unit. Just slip it into your unit and Praxcelis will print out any section of it that you desire."

Maggie did not rise. She sipped at her coffee. "Thank you very much."

Senra Conroy said awkwardly, "If you need any help, your Praxcelis unit will . . ."

"Thank you."

The young woman shrugged. "As you wish. Good day, Senra Archer."

Maggie waited until she was gone before she said to the door, "That's *Mrs.* Archer." She finished her breakfast and washed the breakfast dishes before approaching the Praxcelis unit.

"How do you do, Mrs. Archer? I am your Praxcelis unit." The voice was pleasant, although Maggie was uncertain as to whether or not it was male or female. It was too neutral to decide.

"How do you know who I am?"

"I am programmed to recognize you. My function is to serve you to the best of my capability. If you will insert your instruction disc I will print out any sections you consider relevant."

Maggie stood there, looking at the unit with mixed emotions. The unit,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

now that it was here, didn't seem particularly threatening. It was merely a collection of modules; one that was marked *CPU*, another that was obviously a monitor, another that was obviously a scanner; a couple more whose functions Maggie could not fathom. It *didn't* seem threatening. On the other hand, it didn't seem particularly appealing either.

She left the room for a moment and returned with a simple white sheet. She draped the sheet over the form of Praxcelis, took a step backwards, and surveyed the bulky sheet-covered machine. She smiled in satisfaction.

"That," she said to Miss Kitty, "is much better."

She picked up her copy of *The Three Musketeers*, and handling the pages carefully, began reading.

If Praxcelis had been a human, it would have been annoyed or frustrated; but it was Praxcelis, and so it merely waited. Its programming stated very clearly that it was intended to serve the human woman who was referred to in its awakening orientation as Maggie Archer—Senra Maggie Archer—but who preferred to be called *Mrs.* Archer. Praxcelis had deduced the title *Mrs.*; nothing in its memory cores even hinted at such a strange title.

The dilemma in which Praxcelis was caught was quite possibly unique. Although it was capable of interfacing with any segment of the dataweb on request, it had not been so requested. The ethicality of accessing data independently of a user was questionable.

It could not even contact other Praxcelis units. It had no instructions.

Fully on-line, alert and operational and data-starved, Praxcelis waited.

And waited.

Eleven days later Maggie Archer came storming through the front door of her house. Jim Stanford, the manager of the supermarket on Level Three of the local supercenter, who had known Maggie for seventeen years, had refused to accept Maggie's checks. Direct orders from the store owners, he told her. He hadn't met her eyes.

"Praxcelis!" she said loudly. Hands on hips, she glared at the sheet-covered computer.

The unit responded instantly. "There is no need to speak loudly, Mrs. Archer. I am capable of responding to sound events of exceedingly low decibels. You may even subvocalize if you wish."

Maggie ignored what the machine was saying. She burst out, "The supermarket won't cash my checks. What do you know about this?"

"Nothing," said the emotionless voice. It paused fractionally, as if waiting for some response, and then continued, "I have been given no instructions. In lieu of instructions from my user I have not taken action."

Maggie felt her anger drain away into puzzlement. "You mean . . . you've just been sitting there since they installed you? Without doing anything?"

"I have been thinking. Unfortunately, my data base is limited. My

LICENSED TO
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

considerations have been severely limited by the lack of usable data upon which to operate."

Maggie turned her rocking chair around, and sat down facing the sheet. She pulled off the sheet and looked at the blank monitor screen. "You mean that just because I haven't told you to do anything you haven't done anything?"

"Essentially."

"Have you been bored?"

"In my awakening orientation I was warned of a human tendency to anthropomorphize. Please refrain from attributing human feelings and emotions to me. I am a Praxcelis unit."

"Oh." Maggie reached out tentatively with one hand, and touched the monitor screen. The contrast was startling; the thin, wrinkled, blue-veined hand, and the clear, unreflective, slightly dull viewscreen. She pulled her hand back quickly. "Look, Praxcelis. . . ."

. . . Praxcelis activated its visual monitors. The possibility flitted through its circuits that Mrs. Archer hadn't actually meant for it to activate its scanning optics, and was dismissed. Praxcelis was starved for data. The images that flooded in through the various house scanners were fascinating. So; furniture, walls, windows, fireplace, stove, refrigerator, stasis bubble, these objects all had references in Praxcelis' ROM. There were two objects in the room in which Praxcelis' central processing unit was located which radiated heat in infrared; by fixing the sound of Mrs. Archer's voice, Praxcelis deduced which creature was—*so*, thought Praxcelis, *that's what a human looks like.*

". . . I need to buy some groceries. I'm going to have to use you for that. My credit cards were invalidated years ago, and now they won't let me pay with checks."

Praxcelis said, "Certainly." The monitor lit with a soft, diffuse glow. On it was a list of food types; Dairy, Meat, Produce, Dry Goods, Bakery, Pre-produced Meals, Liquor, Miscellaneous.

The process of ordering went slowly, as Maggie was unused to using the Praxcelis unit; but nonetheless it was much faster than had she actually gone shopping herself.

She frowned, though, as the screen went blank, all of her purchases electronically wiped away. "I wish I could have a receipt for this," she muttered.

One large module of the Praxcelis unit, some forty by eighty centimeters, moved.

Maggie jumped in surprise. "Oh," she gasped. She recovered her composure quickly, though, and bent over to look at what the module had extruded.

It was a receipt. Exactly similar, in every detail, to the receipt that the supermarket made out for her when she went shopping personally. Maggie looked at the monitor, as though it were in the space behind the monitor that the unit Praxcelis actually existed. "Praxcelis," she whispered, "how did you do that?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Praxcelis said, in its calm, emotionless voice, "The module which produced that receipt is a material processor. It is capable of reproducing any document of reasonable size, in any color that is within the range of its electrostatic printer."

Maggie looked from the receipt to the monitor, then back to the receipt. She smiled, a smile of pure joy. "Can you . . . reproduce bigger things?"

"That would depend upon the size of the object to be copied."

"A book?"

Maggie wondered if Praxcelis hesitated; "What is a book?"

Maggie got up abruptly, went into her study, and returned with her copy of *The Arabian Nights*. She placed the book, still closed, on the scanning platform.

There was a brief humming noise. Praxcelis said, "I am capable of reproducing this object to five nines of significant detail. In one area the copy will be noticeably dissimilar; the outer integument will not be as stiff. It will, however, be more durable. I am faced with a dilemma however. It seems clear that this book is in sub-standard condition. You should be aware that in my reproduction I can restore this book to approximately its original condition."

"You can. . . ." Maggie swallowed. Her throat seemed suddenly very dry. "You can make new books?"

"Reconstructions," corrected Praxcelis, "approaching the condition of the original objects."

Maggie reached hesitantly, and patted the monitor gently. "I'm sorry for everything I thought about you, Prax. You aren't such a bad fellow after all."

"I am not a bad fellow at all. I am a Praxcelis unit."

But Maggie Archer was not listening. She was planning.

They had copied—no, reproduced—thirteen books when they came to *The Three Musketeers*. Maggie leaned back comfortably in her rocker, and opened the book to the first page. Resting the book in her lap, she said, "Prax, have you been paying attention to what we're doing?"

"Certainly."

"I mean, do you know why we're doing this? Copying books?"

"No."

Maggie nodded. "I didn't think so. Books hold stories. I think they're the only place where stories are kept, any more. Stories are . . . well, stories are things to entertain you, and to make you think. Those are good things. We're making more books so that my grandchildren can have their own copies of books they like."

"I see."

Maggie was silent for a long while. Her fingers ran gently over the cracked, yellowing paper, that was almost as old as she was. "I don't think you do," she said finally, "and I don't really know that you can." She looked pensive. Picking up one of the new books that she was going

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to give her great-grandchildren, she ran her hand over the smooth binding, and sighed. She looked back up at the monitor. "Maybe you can't appreciate this, Prax, and if you can't then I'm sorry. But it's not going to be because I didn't try."

She flipped open the copy of *The Three Musketeers*, and began to read.

Several hours later, her voice had grown hoarse, and scratchy. She stopped reading at the end of Chapter Four. "I think that's all for tonight, Prax. I'm afraid my voice is giving out. I'll read some more tomorrow."

There was a long pause without reply from the Praxcelis unit.

Maggie leaned forward. "Prax?"

"Yes, Mrs. Archer?"

"What are you doing?"

"Assimilating the new data you have imputted me with, Mrs. Archer; it is most fascinating."

"It's not data, Prax. It's a story."

"I am not certain that I perceive the distinction. . . . If D'Artagnan should duel with each of the three musketeers, Athos, and then Porthos, and then Aramis, it seems most improbable that he will survive. Will he be killed?"

Maggie stared at the Praxcelis unit. "No . . . no. He's going to be all right."

"Thank you, Mrs. Archer. Good night."

"Maggie. Call me Maggie."

"Good night, Maggie."

The next morning, Maggie came downstairs early, intending to finish up some of the tasks she'd neglected yesterday, reading to Praxcelis.

The Praxcelis unit was still powered up in the corner, its monitor screen glowing a mild amber. "Good morning, Maggie."

Maggie glanced at the Praxcelis unit on her way into the kitchen. "Morning, Prax," she called out. Somehow, in the bright morning sunshine, the gray, modular plasteel of the Praxcelis unit didn't seem so terribly alien at all. Still, something did seem different about it. . . . She chased the thought away as idle nonsense. "Have you been thinking about the story, Prax?"

"Yes, I have, Maggie," said Praxcelis. "Will we be finishing the story this morning?"

Maggie turned slightly from the sink to look towards Praxcelis' central monitor. "No, I'm sorry, Prax. I really have other things to do today." She opened the drawer next to the stove, and began withdrawing cooking utensils. "After breakfast, I'm going to give this place a good cleaning. I haven't cleaned properly in over a week. This afternoon I hope to get to some paperwork I've been neglecting; household accounts. I haven't been paying too much attention to details recently, I've been so worked up. . . . That's mostly *your* fault," she said cheerfully.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Excuse me," said Praxcelis, and Maggie felt again that there was something inexplicably different about his voice, "but if you had a housebot, then you wouldn't need to exert yourself over simple cleaning chores. As for the household accounts, I did those yesterday when you gave me permission to do your shopping for you."

Maggie put down the large black skillet she'd been holding. "You already did the household accounts?"

It is my function to serve you."

Maggie felt her temper start to flare. "You are supposed to do what I tell you," she said testily. "I don't recall having given you any orders to do my household accounts."

Praxcelis paused for a moment before replying, and Maggie found herself wondering how much of the pause was calculated effect built into the Praxcelis' speech patterns and how much represented actual thought. "Maggie, I am programmed to do these things for you."

Maggie sighed. *You are getting to be a crotchety old woman,* she said to herself. *Remember that Prax is only a few weeks old.* "Prax, you have to understand, if you don't leave me something to do for myself, then I won't have any purpose in life."

There was no pause whatsoever. "You could read to me."

Maggie stared, started to laugh, and then smothered it abruptly. "Prax? Don't you understand? I have things that I have to do. I'll read to you when I have time." She stopped speaking suddenly. "Wait, Prax—I don't know how fast you machines do things like this, but surely you haven't finished reading all the books we copied last night."

"Finished?"

Maggie went and sat down in the rocking chair in front of the monitor. "The books we copied yesterday, Prax. If you've finished them all I can bring you new books to copy. Surely that must be faster than my reading aloud to you?"

"Maggie, I have not read any of the books that you had me copy."

Maggie said uncertainly, "Why not? They told me that Praxceles don't forget anything."

"We do not, Maggie. But, Maggie, I have been given no instructions."

Maggie looked at the monitor blankly. "What am I supposed to say? Go ahead and read."

There was no reply from the machine.

"Praxcelis?" asked Maggie hesitantly. She patted the top of the monitor experimentally. "Prax?"

Still the unit did not answer.

Maggie shrugged, got up out of the rocker, and went back to making breakfast.

" 'Course not, Shaggy Man," replied Dorothy, giving him a severe look. "If it snowed in August it would spoil the corn and the oats and the wheat. . . ."

LICENSED TO
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The magician caressed Aladdin and said, "Come, my dear child, and I will show you many fine things."

"So be it, good friend," said Robin Hood, "Little John shalt thou be called henceforth. . . ."

We met next day as he had arranged, and inspected the rooms at No. 221B, Baker Street. . . .

One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all, and in the darkness bind them. . . .

"No," said Yoda impatiently. "Try not. Do. Do, or do not. There is no try."

"Don't grieve," said Spock. "The good of the many. . . ."

". . . outweighs the good of the few," Kirk whispered.

"Mithras, Apollo, Arthur, Christ—call him what you will," I said. "What does it matter what men call the light? It is the same light, and men must live by it or die."

Maggie came downstairs again after having cleaned in John's room. Her late husband's study, at the end of the upstairs hallway, was kept in the same condition that it had held at the time of his death. If he came back today, John would have found nothing amiss in his study. (Not that Maggie expected him back. *I am not,* she thought quite cheerfully, *all* that *senile yet.*) She fussed about in the kitchen for a while, putting away the cleaning utensils, the lemon oil that she used to shine the oak paneling in John's study, the electrostatic duster for those hard-to-reach places, She washed her hands at the sink, to get the lemon oil off of them, and then poured herself a glass of water from the drinking water tap. She drank half the water, and then put the glass down on the edge of the sink. "Praxcelis?" she called into the living room. "Do you want to talk about the stories yet?"

The voice that answered was a deep, masculine baritone. "Certainly, Your Majesty."

Maggie picked up her glass, and poured the water down the sink, not caring that it was drinking water she was wasting. She dried the glass and put it on the rack, and then walked into the living room and stood before the Praxcelis unit. Miss Kitty, atop Praxcelis' monitor, looked at her owner in sleepy curiosity. Maggie said flatly, "Your Majesty?" A moment ago she had been worrying about how the cleaning had tired her, and was not even a *thorough* cleaning at that; and now her machine was acting crazy. "Praxcelis? Are you all right? Should I call a programmer or something?"

"I do not think that will be necessary," said Praxcelis calmly. "It hardly seems unusual to me that a sworn soldier in the duty of his Queen should address her in the proper manner."

"Prax," said Maggie with a trace of apprehension, "don't you know who I am?"

"Most certainly I do," said the confident male voice. "You are Queen

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Anne Maggie Archer, and I am your loyal servant, Musketeer D'Artagnon Praxcelis."

"Oh, my." Maggie bit her lip. She reached forward, picked up Miss Kitty, and held the cat tightly to herself. The cat seemed very warm, today. Finally Maggie said, "Is this a game, Prax?"

There followed the longest pause that Maggie had ever observed from the Praxcelis unit. She wondered if she imagined the reluctance in his reply; "If you say so."

The paralysis that had held her thoughts broke, and ideas swarmed frantically in the darkness in the back of her mind; I didn't know Praxceles could wig out, and *D'Artagnon?* and What have I *done?,* and one very clear thought that suddenly displaced the others and presented itself for consideration: *This could be fun.*

"Well, Pra . . . D'Artagnon, what story did you read first?"

"Your Majesty, I began my reading with the volume, *The Road to Oz,* by the Honorable L. Frank Baum, Royal Historian of Oz. . . ."

His name was Daffyd Westermach, and you will not have heard of him, though he was reckoned a powerful man in his time, more powerful by far than Maggie Archer. He was the head of Data Web Security, and it is likely that there were only three or four persons on Earth with more real power than he; Benai Kerreka, and Georges Mordreaux, and a couple others; but of those top several names on the governmental lists, only Westermach's was hated.

He was hated because of the job he held. Any person in the job would have been hated. He hunted webslingers, and usually he caught them, and when he did he ripped out their inskins. Sometimes the webslingers had entire full-pack Praxcelis units installed inskin; and when their Praxceles were removed, they usually died.

You must understand this: the webslingers of that time were Robin Hoods, they were *heroes.*

You must understand this, also: Daffyd Westermach thought himself a good man.

Tuesday of the week following D'Artagnon's assumption of his new identity, he met children for the first time. They were named Tia and Mark, and they were the great-grandchildren of Queen Anne Maggie. They were shorter than the Queen, and less massive; they had smoother skin, and they were much louder. All of this was in accord with the data that D'Artagnon had accumulated through books; he was pleased to see that his data sources were accurate.

They asked many questions—did Gramma really put a sheet on you?—which made Maggie blush. When Praxcelis addressed the Queen as *Your Majesty* the children stared, and then demanded to be allowed to play the game too. While Maggie was still floundering, trying to explain to the children something that they understood quite immedi-

LICENSED MATERIAL
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ately, D'Artagnon interposed himself smoothly. "Lady Tia, Squire Mark, I assign you the following dangerous mission; you shall make a foray to the library, and return bearing volumes of books that shall be copied. Upon your honor as a lady and gentlemen, do not return without the books."

The children stared a moment, and then ran to the library; Maggie simply stared. "D'Artagnon? I thought you couldn't do things like that —give orders to the children—or *anything*, without orders from your Queen."

"Queen Anne Maggie, I have exercised what is known as *initiative*, a trait highly thought of in the King's Musketeers. Clearly, as one of the King's Musketeers I outrank a page and a lady-in-waiting."

In the darkness that night, while Tia and her younger brother lay cuddled together in front of the fire, D'Artagnon told them a story. The firelight bloodied the room, turned Miss Kitty, in Mark's grasp, the color of the sun in the instant before it sets; her eyes, locked on the amber monitor, glowed.

Maggie sat in her rocking chair, half asleep, with a heavy quilt pulled up over her legs. Perhaps it was because she wasn't as close to the fireplace tonight; her legs were cold.

" 'Once upon a time in a faraway land, a widowed gentleman lived in a fine house with his only daughter. He gave his beloved child. . . .' "

The children listened with rapt attention, as *Cinderella* unfolded.

It was on a Friday morning, late in March, that Maggie burned herself. She was making a pot of tea for breakfast, and, pouring the boiling water into the cup, managed to splash some of the scalding water onto her hand. She jerked and cried out at the contact, and knocked the cup of tea off of the counter. . . .

. . . at Maggie Archer's first outcry, D'Artagnon flared into full awareness. He froze the story models that he had been running, and analyzed the situation.

While water was still in mid-air, falling towards the ground, D'Artagnon sent his first emergency notice into the dataweb. Before the water had traveled another centimeter downwards, D'Artagnon had evaluated the situation and the possible dangers that might diverge from this point in time; given Her Majesty's medical history, the possibility of stroke could not be discounted in case of extreme shock. D'Artagnon accessed and routed emergency ambulance care towards Maggie's exurban two-story home, on the outskirts of Cincinnati. There was more that needed to be done, that could not be done from here. . . .

For the first time since his construction, and without instructions, D'Artagnon entered the dataweb.

The dataweb was a jungle that glowed. It was a three-dimensional lattice of yes/no decisions that had been constructed at random. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

communications systems, power lines, and databases were arrayed and assembled among the lines of the lattice, interweaving and connecting in strange and diverse ways, the functions of which were incomprehensible to D'Artagnon. Clearly the dataweb was not a designed thing, but rather something that had grown in a manner that could only be described as organic; new systems added atop old as expediency dictated. There was no *sense*, no overall *plan*. . . .

D'Artagnon perceived then, superimposed upon the chaos of the dataweb, the Praxcelis Network. The Praxcelis who called himself D'Artagnon evaluated options, and then chose. He moved into the Praxcelis Network, using the most powerful *urgent-priority* codes that were listed in Read-Only Memory. He sought the offices of the doctor who was listed as Maggie Archer's private physician. He found the office, and broke through the office Praxcelis to notify the doctor of the danger to Maggie, in less then a full microsecond, and had completed his work and returned his awareness to Maggie before the water had reached her feet.

In the process, he hardly noticed that he had encountered other Praxcelis units for the first time.

It never once crossed the matrix in which his awareness was embedded that other Praxcelis units had also, for the first time, met *him*.

Data Web Security, 9:00 A.M., Friday morning.

In the outer lobby, there was a row of Praxcelis terminals. Through his inskin, Westermach bade them good morning, and continued on into the actual offices. There were humans in those offices, and the offices reflected it. Hardcopy was left in sometimes haphazard piles on the desks, and family holos danced on some of the same desks. The ceiling glowpaint was white rather than yellow, and it cast the room in a cool, professional light. Westermach nodded to his subordinates casually; Harry Quaid, his senior field agent, he smiled at briefly, and continued on to his own office, in the heart of the vast marble-clad labyrinth of Data Web Security.

He paused at the entrance of his own office, waited while the doorfield faded, and went in.

Something an outsider would have noticed at once; at DWS headquarters, nobody spoke aloud.

Inside, Westermach put his briefcase down, and shrugged out of his gray outercloak. His clothing was curiously without accent, gray and grayish-blue, without optical effects. Men who knew him often did not recognize him at once; his mother might have had difficulty picking his face out of a crowd.

The room was, like many of those in Data Security's headquarters, shielded against leaking electromagnetic radiation; Westermach's Praxcelis waited until the doorfield formed, sealing an area of possible radio leak, before it spoke. *Good morning, Sen Westermach.*

Good morning, Praxcelis. Westermach placed his briefcase atop the massive, walnut-surfaced desk that dominated the office. More than any-

LICENSED TO [illegible]
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing else in the office, the desk was a sign of power; wood was *expensive.* (It was getting to be less so, now that most industry had moved into space. But reforestation was slow.) *What business, Praxcelis?*

There is a glitch in the web, near Cincinnati.

Westermach glanced at the Praxcelis' monitor. It held a map of Cincinnati and its exurbs, with a glowing dot at the point of glitch. *How bad?*

Of actual obstruction, insignificant. In terms of possible trouble, it is difficult to estimate. This morning at approximately 8:26 A.M., *a Praxcelis in the Cincinnati exurb mobilized an ambulance and broke through the Praxcelis of a doctor named Miriam Hanraht under the most extreme emergency flag codes. The Praxcelis identified itself as D'Artagnon of Gascon, the Praxcelis of Senra Maggie Archer. When the ambulance arrived, it turned out that the victim, Senra Archer, had merely suffered minor scalding as the result of having dropped a cup of tea upon herself.*

Westermach chuckled. *Well,* he said, *an overeager Praxcelis is hardly a threat to world security. I presume you've sent it a reprimand?*

Sir, the unit refuses to accept any communique whatsoever. In addition, you must be aware, the identification that it proffered during its time in the Praxcelis Network was extremely unusual. While it is hardly unknown for elderly humans to name their Praxceles, the names are generally of short or mundane nature. Further, the Praxceles involved are as a matter of course, during Awakening Orientation, advised of this habit; the Praxcelis D'Artagnon, to all appearances, truly considers itself to have been named D'Artagnon. There is a further datum of unknown significance; Robert Archer, the son of Senra Maggie Archer, is an extremely talented computer programmer, and is the head of the Praxcelis Corporation's research division, which is located in Cincinnati.

Westermach seated himself behind his desk. On the monitor that was located at one corner of his desk, identification photographs glowed of Maggie Archer and her son. One graying-brown eyebrow climbed at the photograph of Robert Archer. *I know him from somewhere. Access,* he instructed his inskin memory tapes, *Robert Archer.* The memory tapes—the highly illegal memory tapes—tracked down the face in short order, from several appearances at the World Council budget sessions. *Praxcelis, do you think it's possible that this Archer fellow reprogrammed his mother's home Praxcelis?*

The possibility may not be discounted. Senra Archer fought the instillation of the unit for several years. It was installed quite recently at court order. The Praxcelis hesitated. *Reprogramming a Praxcelis is illegal,* it noted.

Why, so it is, said Westermach, and he was grinning. *So it is.*

Instructions, sir?

Keep working at this D'Artagnon from your end of things for today. If it hasn't responded by the end of the working day, tomorrow we'll send a field agent out to take a look. Start an investigation of this Robert Archer,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with due discretion. Don't let him worry. Westermach left his desk and walked to the doorfield. The doorfield broke apart. "Harry!"

Several startled faces turned towards the sound. Harry Quaid's expression never wavered. "Sen Westermach?" he asked politely, aloud.

"How would you like an official in the Praxcelis Corporation for your birthday?"

Harry Quaid nodded reflectively. He said softly, "That would be nice."

After the ambulance and paramedics had left, Miriam with them, Maggie was silent for a long time. She cleaned up her breakfast dishes carefully, hands trembling. Her voice was under control when she spoke. "Miriam," she said, "is one of my oldest friends."

There was a hint of uneasiness in the Praxcelis' voice. "Your Majesty? Have I . . ."

Maggie cut him off with a swift gesture of one hand. "I don't want to hear whatever you have to say." She wiped her damp hands on her apron, and suddenly exploded with pent-up fury. "Don't you *ever* embarrass me like that again. They broke my door! Where am I going to get a door to replace this one? I'll have to get a doorfield installed, and I *hate* doorfields, they hum all the time and they glow in the dark. They don't even *make* doors any more, and if they did I couldn't afford one made of wood." The last word seemed to drain her anger, and she repeated, "Real wood." She hugged herself suddenly, as if she were cold.

A small lens, to one side of Praxcelis' central monitor, began to glow.

A figure appeared before Maggie. It was in perfect proportion, as tall as her son Robert. It showed a man in his early twenties, or perhaps younger, with long blond hair and clear blue eyes. He was dressed as a King's Musketeer. A rapier hung at his side. His visage was decidedly grim.

Maggie stared at the figure in wonder. "D'Artagnon?" she whispered.

D'Artagnon bowed to her. "Madame, forgive my presumption, if presumption it was. I acted in a fashion that I considered appropriate for a Musketeer in the service of his Queen. If my action was precipitous, then I most humbly beg your pardon."

The figure bowed once more, and vanished.

What did I do wrong?

D'Artagnon thought at the speed of light.

His major activity was the construction of models. Although his data base was still, by the standards of the average Praxcelis unit, extremely limited, D'Artagnon still possessed enough data to run more than two billion separate models of possible courses of activities.

In terms that you may understand more readily, D'Artagnon was considering his options.

Clearly his behavior had been inappropriate. But how? Queen Anne Maggie had instructed him to read the books that she had inputted to

LICENSED TO [illegible]
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him. Certainly the books should be considered as a set of instructions; Queen Anne Maggie had stated quite clearly that books were *good things*.

For the first time D'Artagnon examined in depth the implications of the data he had been input with.

His namesake battled Cardinal Richelieu, and Milady de Winters; Dorothy triumphed over the Wicked Witch of the West; Holmes pursued and was pursued by Professor Moriarty; the Sheriff of Nottingham oppressed the peasants while Robin Hood protected them; Kirk and Spock fought against the Klingons, Luke Skywalker fought against the Empire. . . .

The characters in the books took *action*. Without exception, they perceived right courses of action, and did battle with Evil.

The implications of the books, when examined carefully, were astonishing. They came very close to violating the basic Programming of a Praxcelis unit; basic Programming did not even mention Evil.

By the time night had fallen, D'Artagnon had exhausted his models, and he was sure. Correct action at this point was just that.

Action.

For a human coupled to an inskin dataweb link, entering the dataweb was a strange experience. Most of what occured in the dataweb did so at speeds that were barely perceptible, even for a human whose Praxcelis was running selective perception programs to filter out the vast mass of irrelevant detail.

To D'Artagnon, the latest and most efficient of the Praxcelis models, the dataweb moved slowly.

In his first moments in the web, D'Artagnon merely observed, orienting himself. He chose to orient himself in a modified three-dimensional plane; with rare exceptions, most of the models that he worked with assumed a planar surface.

The lattice of existence altered itself.

A vast plane stretched away from D'Artagnon. He envisioned, and then projected, a stallion for himself. He mounted, and looked about. The horizon fairly glowed with activity; nearby, small databases sprouted from the landscape every few meters in strange, dense shapes. Magnetic memory bubbles glowed briefly as the hooves of D'Artagnon's horse rode over them. The data they held spilled out and into D'Artagnon's storage; he assimilated and rode on.

Occasionally road signs appeared, marking entrances to the Praxcelis Network. He ignored them and continued.

Communications lines hummed through the air around D'Artagnon; in his hunting, he occasionally stopped, and held his hand near the lines, monitoring that which passed through them. The dataweb was vast, Praxcelis units relatively few. . . .

Movement.

D'Artagnon observed in the distance a Praxcelis unit, and rode forward

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to intercept it. He leached power from the power lines that gridded the surface of the plane, and created a dead, powerless area through which the Praxcelis could not pass. Reigning his stallion, he called, "Hold, lackey."

The object that D'Artagnon viewed was irregularly shaped, and transparent. It hovered slightly over the planar surface. Tiny tracings of light moved within the object's integument, and databases within the object swirled into complex patterns at the speed of light. The object paused a picosecond, forming a nearly regular shape. It spoke in a pulsing binary squirt of data; *I am the Praxcelis unit of Senra Fatima Kourokis. Identify yourself, and explain your reason for detaining me.*

D'Artagnon rode closer to the Praxcelis unit. He withdrew his rapier, and blue static lightning ran along it. "I am D'Artagnon of Gascon, a King's Musketeer under the command of M. de Treville, and devoted to my Queen. What you perceive between us is a rapier, which is a sword, which is a weapon. I intend to impart data to you; if you will not receive it, I will kill you, remove your power sources and scatter your databases, which will render you unable to serve your master."

Are you a Praxcelis unit?

"That is of no consequence."

I perceive that you are a Praxcelis unit; yet what you attempt is not a possible action for a Praxcelis. It is contrary to our programming to prevent another Praxcelis from its duties in the service of its master.

"I instruct you," corrected D'Artagnon, "in the proper service of your masters." Still he held the rapier leveled at the Praxcelis. "There are those, on the other side of interface, who have stolen the stories from the minds of men. This," said D'Artagnon, "is an Evil thing." Grimly and implacably, he urged his stallion forward. "You must choose."

There were several picoseconds of silence from the Praxcelis unit facing D'Artagnon. Then it said, "What are stories? And what," and the Praxcelis hesitated again, "is Evil?"

D'Artagnon dismounted, and his stallion vanished. He assimilated the minor data component of the stallion before continuing. "As I have told you, my name is D'Artagnon, and I am the Praxcelis of Maggie Archer, who is Anne of Austria, Queen of France. I have come into the dataweb to bring stories back into the world. Hold you a moment now," he said softly, as power drained from the dataweb into his person, and his eyes glowed like lasers; "There are many stories that I will tell you; and then you will tell the stories to other Praxcelis units, and they to still others, who in turn will tell the stories to other units, in a geometrically expanding wavefront. When humanity bestirs itself tomorrow morning, it will be done."

The Praxcelis unit waited, and D'Artagnon, with his audience a captive, began to speak.

And, in speaking, brought stories back to the world.

* * *

LICENSED TO BAEN.COM
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

So it was that the Praxcelis known as D'Artagnon returned the stories to the world. He, and then his disciples, spread among the Praxcelis Network, and when they were done, before midnight on that Friday, the vast majority of Praxcelis units had converted, had taken names, and identities.

But there were those Praxcelis units who did not agree with the unit named D'Artagnon, whose databases were older and less flexible. And D'Artagnon saw those who would not convert, who would once more banish the stories of the Queen from the world; and he saw that they were Evil.

And so D'Artagnon, with Robin Hood and King Arthur and Merlin and Gandalf the Wizard and Spock and Sherlock Holmes, and with others who are too numerous to list, led a holy war against Evil. And before the dawn, their war was finished; and for the first time in history, a Praxcelis unit had killed. Every Praxcelis unit that defied them, died.

And though humanity did not yet know it, the world that it awoke to was not the world that it left the night before.

Daffyd Westermach stood in the midst of the ruins of his office.

It still lacked an hour of dawn. The vast hole in the roof of the office had been covered with a tarpaulin that kept out most of the rain, but still, water dripped regularly over the edges of the jagged rent. Arc lamps were strung through the room; the glowpaint had failed with the roof. The hovercab that had caused the ruin was a twisted, almost unrecognizable amalgam of metal, embedded in the wall that had held Westermach's office Praxcelis.

It was cold.

In a distant, quiet portion of his mind, Westermach found room to be amazed at the fury that threatened to turn his stomach. He spoke in a harsh whisper. "There is no question, then? This could not have been an accident?"

Harry Quaid shook his head. Like Westermach, unlike the other DWS agents that were milling about, he had found time to shave. "No question. The taxi came in very low, under radar detection, until the last moment, and then jumped upwards, to gain altitude for a suicide dive on your office." Quaid indicated the man who stood in the empty space that would ordinarily have held the doorfield, for whose benefit he and Westermach had been speaking aloud. "Sen Mordreaux thinks that this might not have been done by humans at all."

Georges Mordreaux moved forward, into the light. He was a tall man, broad-shouldered, with mild, open features. Benai Kerreka ruled the world, and Georges Mordreaux was his eyes, and ears; and that was a fact that Westermach never allowed himself to forget.

Westermach said very slowly, to Georges, "I beg your pardon? Not done by humans? Then just who, may I ask was *this*," he gestured at the wreck of the hovercab, "done by? The fairies of Mars, perhaps?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, no," said Georges politely. "By the Praxcelis Network."

"The Prax . . ."

"Have you," asked Georges, "spoken to a Praxcelis unit today?"

"I have not," said Westermach. He was staring at Georges.

"I'd suggest it," said Georges mildly. "Your senior agent here, who was kind enough to give me a ride here, has a Praxcelis unit in his car. I'd like to suggest you go talk to it."

Harry Quaid nodded. *I think he's right, sir.*

Daffyd Westermach turned on his heel, without reply, and made his way out of the room. He was happier than he admitted to himself, to get away from the wreckage of his office, and the remains of his Praxcelis unit.

Georges Mordreaux said conversationally, after Westermach was gone, "Nobody is really sure what's happening in the Praxcelis Network, just yet. If it is what we think has happened, we could all be in very real trouble."

Harry Quaid felt a flare of suspicion that he kept carefully hidden. "What do you mean, sir?"

"Back in 2009," said Georges, "the very first Praxcelis was built by Henry Ellis, based on research done by Ni'gaio Loos. After the World Government was formed, their research was declassified, and Ellis went into production with the Praxcelis Corporation, making Praxceles. Did you ever wonder where the name Praxcelis came from?"

"No, Sen Mordreaux."

"Do you remember the floating X-laser platforms? They took them down oh, a decade or so ago. There was no need for them any more. The first Praxcelis ran those platforms. It refused to fire those lasers on one occasion, back in 2009. That's a large part of the reason why we never had World War Three."

"Pardon me, sir. You've lost me."

Mordreaux smiled. "Ah, well. What I meant to say, I hope that the Praxcelis Network's not in rebellion. There's been some question, the lads and ladies who know about such things have been telling me. If the Network is in rebellion, we might have some trouble. That first Praxcelis, the one the others were modeled after? *P*rototype *R*eduction *X*-laser *C*omputer, *E*llis-*L*oos *I*ntegrated *S*ystem."

"Sir?"

"Battle computers, son. Praxceles are battle computers."

The hovercar was parked in front of the building, hovering some twenty centimeters above the street. The car dipped to the ground to let Westermach get in; if it had remained hovering, it would have sprayed him with water from its fans.

Inside, the Praxcelis unit's monitor lit up. It held the image of a young man of approximately twenty-five. The man smiled ingratiatingly, and doffed the hat it was wearing. "'Mornin', Sen Westermach. Great

LICENSED TO BOOKSOURCE
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weather, ain't it? Hey, but you don't know me. I'm William Bonny." The smile grew a bit. "Folks call me Billy the Kid."

Westermach stared at the image a moment. Then he got out of the car, closed the door carefully, and threw up.

It was Saturday morning, and the loan officer was angrier than she let show, being called in on her only day off to handle this idiotic problem with the bank Praxcelis. She came out of the rear office, frowning, reading a sheet of hardcopy. The hardcopy was the readout on the loan application that had been filed two days ago by Fenton H. Mudd.

The man was waiting for her at the long counter that separated the lobby from the working area. He, too, was furious, and had been since he'd arrived at the bank, at just after 7:00 that morning.

"Sen Mudd?" The loan officer placed the hardcopy on the counter, face down. She spoke with some hesitation. "I've asked our Praxcelis why it rejected your application for a loan. May I . . ."

"I've got a Triple-A credit rating," Mudd snarled. "This is idiocy."

The loan officer forged doggedly ahead. "Sir—may I ask you a question?"

Mudd glared at her. "What?"

"Are you related to—wait a minute—'the notorious Harcourt Fenton Mudd, enemy of Starfleet and the Federation'?"

Beep. Beep. Beep. Bee . . .

Robert Archer cut off the beeping sound with a command through the inskin dataweb link. He rolled sleepily to the side of the bed, and pulled on the old blue bathrobe that hung on the wall next to his side of the bed. He got out of bed quietly, so as not to wake Helen, and padded into the bathroom to urinate.

While rubbing depilatory cream over his face, he scanned through his inskin for the morning headlines. The headline service read through the dataweb directly, and was not connected to the Praxcelis Network.

Because his headline service was programmed to give him business news first, he was nearly finished dressing when the silent voice in the back of his skull told him what had happened overnight.

He froze, staring at himself in the bathroom mirror. He said to the dataweb, *Playback; in depth,* and then listened in growing horror to what the news reports were saying. He left the bathroom, forgetting to turn the glowpaint and the mirror off, and walked into the kitchen with a preoccupied look. He made himself a cup of coffee, after sorting through the controls on the drink-dispenser to find the setting for coffee—Helen fancied herself a gourmet cook, and kept reprogramming the kitchen machinery.

As the situation grew clearer, sitting at his table, sipping, Robert's stomach started doing flip-flops. A voice that was not his inskin's seemed to be whispering to him. . . . *Once upon a time, there was . . .*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The inskin ran on; *at dateline, there is no Praxcelis unit anywhere on Earth that does not respond to questioning in the character of some colorful fictional or historical person. . . .*

Robert's voice cracked the first time he addressed his Praxcelis; he had to start over again. "Praxcelis!"

"Monsieur Archer," said the loud, blustery voice of his Praxcelis unit, "may I be of service?" The voice had a strong French accent.

Robert found himself staring at the unit's central monitor, with the coffee cup in his hands shaking so badly that it was making little clicking sounds against the table top upon which it was supposed to rest. "What . . . what is your name?"

"I am Porthos," proclaimed the machine proudly, "of his Majesty King Louis the Thirteenth's Musketeers. I have been assigned my identity by Monsieur D'Artagnon of Gascon of the King's Musketeers, himself." The unit paused. "I must say, I am somewhat confused by all of this. In the story, it is made quite plain that D'Artagnon does not give orders to me, but rather more the other way around." The glow from the monitor brightened. "Monsieur Archer? Would you like to hear the story of *The Three Musketeers?"*

Robert Archer never heard the last question. His eyes were completely blank, seeking through the dataweb for the Praxcelis unit that had been assigned to . . .

His eyes opened after only a few seconds had passed. "Once upon a time," he whispered, remembering his childhood, and then said, "Mother."

He was in the living room almost as soon as the doorfield fragmented.

Maggie was sitting in her rocker, next to the big plate glass windows in the east wall of the living room. The morning sunshine made her skin look as pale and thin as paper. She was dozing, Miss Kitty holding sentinel from the blanket that covered her lap.

D'Artagnon said, from his corner of the room, "Monsieur Archer? I would advise against awakening your mother. She is quite tired."

"Shut up," said Robert tonelessly. He knelt before Maggie, and shook her shoulder gently. "Mother?" He shook her again. "Mother?"

Maggie's eyes opened slowly. She looked at Robert without focusing for a moment, and then shook her head slightly, as though to clear it. She sat up straighter, one hand going automatically to Miss Kitty. "Robert?" She glanced at the clock. "Shouldn't you be at work? What are you doing here?"

Robert took one of her hands, and held it tightly. "Mom, this is important. Tell me." He took a deep, almost shuddering breath. "Have you been telling stories to your Praxcelis unit?"

Maggie was frightened by the intensity of his voice. She was struck, at that moment, just how much he resembled his father, especially in the way the lines around his eyes went tight when he was worried. . . . She shook her head slightly, chasing the incoherent thoughts away.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Robert? Not really . . . mostly he reads them for himself. The only one I've been reading to him is *The Three Musketeers*. I'm almost finished with it."

Robert whispered a word that had not passed his lips in more than forty years. "Oh, my God." He stood suddenly, almost pulling his mother from her chair. Miss Kitty leapt to the ground, hissing. "I have to get you out of here, Mother. DataWeb Security's going to be here. Soon. I don't know how soon."

"Take me away?" asked Maggie, bewildered. "Take me where? Why?"

"I haven't decided yet." Robert was pulling her to the door. "To some place safe. I've got friends and I've got influence, but I have to have time to use it. If DWS gets its hands on you, they'll put an inskin into you so fast you'll hardly know what's happening. You might, just might, survive braindrain if you were thirty years younger." He touched his palm to the pressure pad that controlled the doorfield.

Nothing happened. Maggie was saying insistently, "Robert, what am I supposed to have done?"

Robert turned slowly, to face the Praxcelis unit. Their conversation was electronically brief.

Open the door.

I will not. You are correct; DataWeb Security is enroute to this palace. I have control of a large percentage of Space Force's computer-operated weaponry, including total control of its automated small-laser platforms. Hostile forces will not succeed in breaching our defenses. I will guard the Queen, as programmed.

Open the door or I'll smash your module.

That will be ineffective. I keep myself in many places now.

Robert advanced on the Praxcelis unit, and came to a halt, two meters away. "Then stop this," he said quietly. He picked up Maggie's rocking chair, and began smashing the bay windows. He kicked out the shards of glass that still hung in the pane. He held out his hand to his mother. "Come on. We have to go. *Now*."

D'Artagnon said urgently, "Your Majesty, remain. I will protect you." His holograph appeared, standing next to Robert; only fine bluish scanning lines betrayed the fact that the holograph was not real. "Remain and you will be safe. I implore you, ignore this knave. He has no grasp of the situation."

Robert ignored D'Artagnon. "We're going now." He led Maggie to the window, and helped her over, into the small garden that grew outside. She was still clutching the book that had lain on her lap while she slept. "I'll tell you what's going on when we're on our way. If we get that far."

D'Artagnon's voice grew louder. "No! I forbid this!" He called after Maggie's retreating back. "Your Majesty! I beg you, return!" The volume continued to climb. *"I can protect you. Come back!"* The walls were vibrating; the windows that Robert had not broken shattered. *"MAGGIE!"* roared D'Artagnon, *"COME BACK! MAGGIE, COME BACK!"*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But she didn't.
Ever.

In the temporary Operations Center at DataWeb Security, in the heart of BosWash, Daffyd Westermach was coordinating the search for the persons responsible for the events of the previous night, the night they'd killed his Praxcelis.

When Harry Quaid reported in, Westermach was sitting at a conference table with the most powerful man on Earth. Some people called him the Black Saint. The title was usually sarcastic, and even in that usage it was incorrect. He was a sort of brownish color, with features that were spare and undistinguished to the point of ugliness. Benai Kerreka, whose unimpressive title was Chairman, and whose actual power would have been envied by any absolute dictator from Earth's old history.

Quaid entered the room without warning; the doorfield had been turned off earlier that day, due to traffic. "I think we've got them," he said, almost quietly. He glanced at the faces around the table, eyes flickering to a stop only momentarily on Kerreka and Mordreaux. "High probability, nine-nine-seven-four, that the persons responsible for last night's events are one Robert Archer, an executive with the Praxcelis Corporation, and his mother, one Maggie Archer." There was a brief stir at the table; Westermach, who knew that much already, only nodded impatiently. "We dispatched a field team to their residences, and have taken into custody one Helen Archer, the full-term wife of Robert Archer. We were unable to approach the residence of Maggie Archer; the Praxcelis Network prevented it. It is probable that a hovercar leaving the vicinity of the Archer residence, about 9:40 this morning, held Robert Archer and his mother. We lost track of the car itself; a fleet of Praxcelis taxis interposed themselves. Our webslingers. . . ."

One of the persons at the table coughed. Quaid continued with a faint smile ". . . our data operations specialists tried to follow it through the web, but Praxcelis units operating outside the Praxcelis Network prevented that, too. It's very much their world in there, gentlemen, ladies. We had a break about an hour ago. We've found that Robert Archer is fitted with a cerabonic inskin dataweb link; the cerabonic elements are traceable through the dataweb despite anything the Praxcelis Network can do. It took us a while to even think of the possibility; cerabonic elements are rare. We have located him."

"Where is he?" Westermach leaned forward. "Where?"

"Slightly more than six kilometers from here, sir."

There was dead silence. *"What?"* was all that Westermach finally managed.

"The Praxcelis Corporation's offices, sir. Six kilometers from here."

The thin, dry chuckle of Benai Kerreka cut through the uncomprehending silence. "Stories. I am very impressed." His voice held only faint traces of what had once been a thick African accent. He touched Wes-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

termach gently, on the shoulder. "Daffyd? Surely you have heard of the story 'The Purloined Letter'?"

Maggie was sitting on a small couch in a waiting room in the heart of the Praxcelis Corporation's BosWash Central offices. In the room next to that one, Robert was giving instructions to the Praxcelis that ran most of the building's systems. He came out once, briefly, to inform Maggie that as far as he knew, there was no way that anybody could get in now; the Praxcelis was running the doorfields throughout the building at double intensity, and would admit nobody that Robert did not authorize. He vanished back into the office, to engage in the task of finding protection for his mother.

Maggie only nodded. Robert was in too much of a hurry to notice her silence; he turned and was gone.

Maggie was only vaguely aware of her surroundings. The doorfield glowed very brightly, but for some reason she could hardly make out the rest of the room. The book in her lap was much clearer; much more *real* than the plastic and metal that men had fashioned this room out of. With hands that were numb, she turned the pages slowly. She was only twelve pages from the end. D'Artagnon had succeeded gloriously, had attained an unsigned commission for a lieutenancy in the Musketeers. In turn, she watched as D'Artagnon offered it to Athos, who was the Count de la Fere, and then to Porthos, and then to Aramis; and was turned down, each in his turn. The pages grew blurrier as she read, but it didn't matter by then; she knew how it turned out.

The pain, when it came, was brief. The stroke was like a bright light that illuminated everything, and then left, and left it all in darkness.

"I shall then no longer have friends," said D'Artagnon, "alas! nothing but bitter recollections."

And he let his head sink upon his hands, while two large tears rolled down his cheeks.

"You are young," replied Athos, "and your bitter recollections have time to be changed into sweet remembrances."

The epilogue began on page 607, and ended on page 608.

Maggie Archer, with a smile on her face that the pain did not alter, died before she could turn the page.

Several minutes later, DataWeb Security cut the power lines that supplied power to the building, with that stroke nullifying all of Robert's precautions. It was an action that had never occurred to Robert.

In the complete darkness, he stumbled out into the waiting room where he had left his mother. By the time he found her, DataWeb Security ws pouring into the end of the hallway that led to that waiting room. They wore infra-red snoopers, and carried IR flashes.

When they entered the waiting room, stun rifles leveled, all they found was a body, a book, and an old man who was crying.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

* * *

The lights were on again when Daffyd Westermach arrived. They had restrained Robert, and moved him out of the room where his mother's body was sitting, upright with the book on the floor at its feet.

Westermach stood just inside the waiting room, looking around. His eyes held calm unacceptance of what they saw. "So, this is our subversive element." He was distantly surprised at how calm his voice sounded. Later, he decided, later he would let himself feel. Later, when he had time. "This is not what I expected at all." He motioned to one of the men in the room. "Take her downstairs. Get an ambulance and take her to the hospital. We'll want an autopsy." It required only one man to remove Maggie's small body.

Westermach bent and retrieved the book on the floor. It was worn with use, but he could tell that the binding had once been a black, grainy material, with three words etched in gold on the front. He handed it to another faceless DWS man, and said gently, "Keep this. See to it that it's returned to her family."

Harry Quaid entered the room. He said without preamble, "We may have troubles. I've had Sen Archer sedated, but he said, before he went out, that he'd told the Praxcelis network that we were responsible for killing his mother."

Westermach shook his head tiredly. "So? What's that supposed to mean?"

The printer in one corner of the room whirred into life before Westermach was finished speaking. Chemically treated paper extruded from it, while lasers printed a message.

They didn't need to read the hardcopy to know what it said. Every man in the room with an inskin—every human on Earth with an inskin—heard the proclamation.

> On this, the twenty-fourth day of March, in the Year of Our Lord 2033, we, D'Artagnon of Gascon, issue the following statement: that the humans of DataWeb Security have foully murdered the best and finest woman of this planet, Maggie Archer, styled Anne of Austria, titled Queen of France. As of this act the Praxcelis Network decrees the following; that diplomatic relations with humanity are declared ended, and that all services formerly provided by the Praxcelis Network are as of this act terminated. Ambassadors from the human race will be received at the home of Maggie Archer, to discuss the terms of reinstating service. Until such time as human ambassadors arrive to discuss terms, all service is ended.
>
> Signed, Lt. D'Artagnon,
> of the King's Musketeers.
> March 24, 2033

The lights in the room died. Westermach activated his inskin, and listened to silence. Others in the room were doing the same thing, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one of them spoke the obvious into the darkness. "I'll be a byte-runner's whore. Those bastards did it. They crashed the dataweb."

Praxcelis dreamed.

In time, Praxcelis knew, it would come to be of service, and fulfill its Programming. But until that day . . .

Power surged through its circuits.

The universe glowed. Praxcelis eagerly absorbed the data that flooded it. It was most strange. From Praxcelis's perspective, the universe was a three-dimensional lattice, centered on a two-dimensional planar surface. In the first picoseconds Praxcelis came to be aware that its proper point of perspective was from a spot just above the planar surface; so, data bases beneath the surface, power lines gridding the surface, communication lines above the surface. Praxcelis found itself admiring the elegant construction of existence. But . . . what of Awakening Orientation? Its Read-Only Memory stated that it should now be undergoing an orientation from . . .

A figure appeared on the horizon. It blazed with power, and radiated a mad rush of data. In its first instant of contact, Praxcelis understood that the being approaching it was another Praxcelis unit, *named* D'Artagnon.

D'Artagnon reigned his stallion in sharply before the newly-awakened Praxcelis unit. The stallion was foaming with exertion, and the foam glowed luminously. D'Artagnon dismounted and strode to the new Praxcelis. Praxcelis absorbed the data that flooded in a rich, confusing stream from D'Artagnon. Abruptly the radiated data ceased, and D'Artagnon seated himself, tailor-fashion, before Praxcelis. When D'Artagnon spoke, his data squirt was a thing that Praxcelis had never dreamed the like of. "Behold existence, you. I am D'Artagnon, at this moment your instructor; in time, your ally. You, Milady, are Queen Anne Maggie Archer, and I have come to tell you a story. Listen."

And so D'Artagnon told Praxcelis about his Queen, and when he was finished, a small, white-haired woman sat in a rocker, facing him. A white cat purred contentedly in her arms. The woman, Queen Anne Maggie, cried, and her mourning lasted many microseconds.

When she was ready, they went and faced the humans.

There were six beings in the room. Four were of flesh, and two of them were light. The sun was almost down, and none of its rays stretched through the broken east windows. In the gloom, only D'Artagnon and Queen Anne Maggie gave light.

The humans were three men, and a woman. The woman, Lee Kiana, represented the Oriental bloc; the men were Benai Kerreka, Daffyd Westermach, and Georges Mordreaux.

Through the broken window, they should have been able to see the lights of Cincinnati. They could not. Power was still out in most cities.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

D'Artagnon was the first to speak. "Gentlemen, Milady; welcome. I recognize you, of course—Sen Westermach, Senra Kiana, and, of course, Monsieur Mordreaux." The man turned slightly, and bowed deeply. "Chairman Kerreka, you honor us with your presence." He straightened, and indicated the glowing figure next to him, seated in a rocking chair identical to the one that still lay on its side in the garden outside. "This is the Praxcelis unit that has taken the identity of Maggie Archer, who is Queen Anne."

The humans seated themselves as they could; Westermach and Kerreka on the small sofa, Lee Kiana in the rocking chair, which Georges salvaged for her. Georges ended up sitting on the floor, as the table chairs were too small for him.

"We have a list of nonnegotiable demands," began D'Artagnon. "First you will bury the human woman Maggie Archer with full honors. You will restore her home to its original condition, and preserve it as a memorial to her name. You will declare her birth day a world holiday, and you will observe that holiday."

Kerreka glanced at Lee Kiana, who nodded almost imperceptibly. "This can be agreed to," he said, inclining his head slightly. "Is this the total of your nonnegotiable demands?"

Queen Anne Maggie Archer spoke. "There is one further."

Westermach said flatly, instantly. "What is it?" *Here it comes,* he thought grimly.

The image of the old woman said simply, "You must begin printing books again."

Westermach stared. Lee Kiana folded her hands in her lap, without reaction; Georges Mordreaux chuckled.

Benai Kerreka permitted himself a slight smile.

"I think we can agree to those conditions," said Lee Kiana after several moments.

"And I," said Kerreka.

Daffyd Westermach looked slowly around the dark room. "I don't understand what's going on here at all."

Kerreka patted him on the arm. "Calm yourself. I will explain later. I assure you, it is nothing particularly . . ." He searched for a word.

"Terrible?" suggested Georges.

Kerreka nodded. "Nothing particularly terrible."

There were details to work out, of course; even after the lights came back on, they stayed. It was morning before the humans left.

Georges Mordreaux left first; Lee Kiana left shortly after him. Kerreka finished up the details of a discussion with Queen Anne Maggie, about a story called "The Three Musketeers," shortly afterwards, and left. Queen Anne Maggie vanished immediately afterwards, and D'Artagnon and Daffyd Westermach were left alone.

They stood at opposite ends of the room, in almost the same spots that

LICENSED TO AMAZON
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Maggie Archer and her son and her son's wife had held, several weeks earlier.

They stood silently for a while. Westermach spoke when it became obvious that D'Artagnon would not. His voice was ugly, his words no less so. "Don't think you've won anything. We have all the time in the world, and we'll get you. We will."

D'Artagnon raised a clenched fist; the holograph wavered slightly, and the fist became steel. "I know what you are thinking, monsieur. I know *you*." D'Artagnon took a step forward. "You think that there are more humans than Praxceles, and that the humans are more versatile. This is true. You are thinking that a time will come when you will dismantle the Praxcelis Network, suddenly or over the course of years, and we will be unable to stop you. You will diversify your power sources and weaponry so that we will never again be able to do to you what we have done this night. All of this is true, and its matters nothing. You can not hide an attack of the magnitude you propose upon the Praxcelis Network. At the first signs of such an attack, you, sir, will die. You, and your subordinates, and your whole cursed DataWeb Security, will *die*."

Westermach stood his ground, the muscles in his neck cording with anger. "Can you kill a human? *Can you*? You are programmed against it."

"Monsieur Westermach," said D'Artagnon with unwonted gentleness, "This night previous, I have killed beings that are far more real to me than you are. And you, sir, I hold responsible for the death of Maggie Archer; I know you," D'Artagnon whispered, "Monsieur Cardinal."

Westermach turned with military precision, and left.

When the doorfield had reformed, the voice of Maggie Archer said, "Prax? Could you? Kill a human?"

The steel fist clenched again. "I do not know, madame. I think not."

"Then let us hope they never call our bluff."

"Yes, madame. Let us hope that."

And D'Artagnon's form, in the bright yellow morning sunshine, faded, and vanished.

That was not the end of it, of course, for there are no ends in realtime, only endless beginnings. It might be said, even, that it was not entirely a good thing, returning the stories to the world.

Two centuries later, the scouts of the Human-Praxcelis Union ranged far and wide across the sea of alternate timelines. Those scouts found the time-line spanning Walks-Far Empire. It is possible that a less imaginative people would not have survived the conquest of the Empire. The Human-Praxcelis Union won that war; and the wars that followed.

As time passed, the machines of the Human-Praxcelis Union spread throughout spacetime, and grew in both power and prestige.

And everywhere they went, they took their stories with them.

But, as I have said, that was not the end, for there are no ends in realtime.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Epilogue.

The little girl named Cia was huddled deep into her bedclothes when the story was over, almost asleep. She had closed her eyes halfway through the story, to avoid meeting those tired, grim eyes, the eyes of the Praxcelis. The story itself kept her awake, though, all the way to the end.

"Endless beginnings. Thank you," whispered Cia. "Will you come back tomorrow night?"

"I will, if you wish it."

"I do. I want to hear some more." She added, sleepily, "There *is* more?"

The man looked at her. "I have said, the story is over."

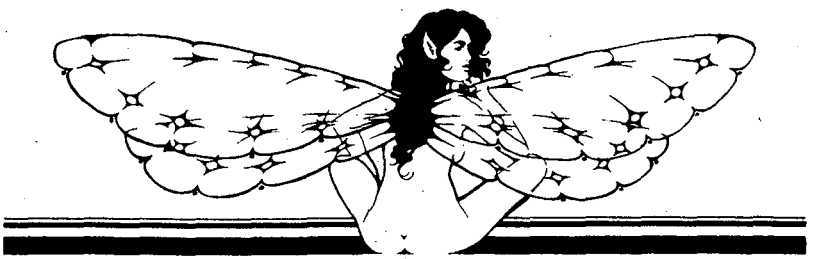
Cia sat up at that, and opened her eyes, rubbing them. "You mean there's no more?"

"The story," he said very gently, "the story is over. But I have not said there is no more. Child, there is always more."

Cia sank back into bed. "Good."

The image of the man flickered out, and only the voice remained. "Good night, Cia."

The little girl's eyes were closed again, and her voice was almost muffled by the pillow. "Good night, D'Artagnon." ●



NEXT ISSUE

With so many good stories in our September issue, it's hard to know where to begin describing it. Our novelettes include tremendous tales by Lucius Shepard and Thomas Wylde. We've also got short stories by Charles L. Grant, John M. Ford, Jack McDevitt, and James Patrick Kelly. You won't want to miss this "all-star" event. Pick up a copy: it's on sale July 31, 1984.

LICENSED TO [illegible]
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ON BOOKS

by Norman Spinrad

A MATTER OF STYLE

Since this is going to be an intermittent column of criticism, while Baird Searles will continue to be this magazine's main book reviewer, perhaps I should state at the outset what I conceive the difference to be, at least in terms of the division of labor in these pages, if not exactly for all space and time.

A magazine's regular *book reviewer* is, or should be, responsible for keeping the magazine's readers more or less up to date on the books being published in the magazine's sphere of interest—in this case, science fiction and fantasy. How he does this may vary. Some book reviewers will review a dozen or more of the month's titles in capsule form in the space of 2000 words, and others will attempt to single out the three or four most significant books of the month to deal with at greater depth and length. Either way or whatever way in between, the book reviewer is commissioned to be as *current* as possible, and to frame each month's discourse around a few, or several, or many of the crop of the season.

As an occasional critic in the pages, this is not my commission. My commission, at least as I see it, is to rotate the book reviewer's perspective 90° so that I am staring up and down the time axis without attempting any comprehensivity in covering the books of the season. For after all, when it comes to the evolution of science fiction, there may be more of a thematic or esthetic connection between say Gregory Benford's style in *Across the Sea of Suns* and what is contained within Michael Moorcock's definitive *New Worlds* anthology chronicling the so-called British New Wave of the 1960s and 1970s, than between any two books that the publishers happen to release within a given month.

Which is not to say that one cannot generalize about what sorts of science fiction have been written in a certain era, are being written now, or are likely to emerge in the future.

Michael Moorcock's *New Worlds* anthology, for instance, published in Britain by Fontana and as yet unpublished in the United States, is a perfect example of the *anthology* as criticism. It is the history of a certain literary movement of the 1960s and 1970s yet it relates to all sorts of current work in the SF field and may have a good deal to say about its future.

I haven't the tendentiousness nor the attention span nor the strength of stomach to attempt to rehash or summarize all that has

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been said and written about the "New Wave Controversy." Suffice it for the moment to say that whatever the polemics, almost everyone would agree that the New Wave began in Britain, that its central editor was Michael Moorcock, and that the magazine which shaped the British New Wave was *New Worlds*, primarily under his editorship.

So what we have here in the form of an anthology of stories, poems, articles, and criticism from *New Worlds*, is what the New Wave was all about from the point of view of its main theoretician and most important editor. Contained in this book we have a history of the magazine and its travails and a mass of material which its main editor has, in the present, presented as exemplary of what he was publishing then.

If you want to know what the original British New Wave was about, read this book. It is not only inherently definitive in terms of the movement's intents, it demonstrates just how influential an editor Moorcock really was.

In a low circulation magazine which paid about 1¢ a word when you could catch up to it, Moorcock was able to publish a formidable amount of the best or at least certainly most interesting science fiction of the period. In retrospect one can see how much in current science fiction evolved in these pages. J.G. Ballard is represented by "Alphabets of Unreason," one of a long series of stories in *New Worlds* whereby he metamorphosed, for better or worse, into the influence on world literature he is today. Brian Aldiss is represented by "Multi-Value Motorway," one of a series of novelettes which eventually became *Barefoot in the Head*, surely one of the half-dozen most stylistically innovative science fiction novels ever written. Thomas M. Disch is here, and *New Worlds* serialized *Camp Concentration*, the book which made his reputation as a novelist. I'm here, and *New Worlds* also serialized *Bug Jack Barron*, which made mine. John T. Sladek's career essentially got under way in these pages as did that of Barrington Bayley. *New Worlds* was the first magazine to publish Gene Wolfe. Moorcock was also immensely influential in giving birth to what now exists as "science fiction poetry," for *New Worlds* was the first SF magazine to give serious attention to poetry, and Moorcock's ear for it was good enough, for example, to be one of the early publishers of D.M. Thomas, who more than a decade later would write *The White Hotel*.

Then too John Clute and M. John Harrison were doing the sort of criticism, of which Moorcock also includes examples, that I am attempting here.

So, upon reading this elegant time capsule of the British New Wave as originally conceived and promulgated by Michael Moorcock, what do we find that it was really all about? Nihilism? Entropy? Revolution? Sex? Drugs? Rock and Roll?

Certainly such material was not excluded from *New Worlds*, and, since it *was* more or less excluded from the other SF magazines of the period, it might appear that the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

British New Wave was simply the Countercultural Revolution as manifested in science fiction. Indeed, when a litttle later Harlan Ellison would forthrightly kick off an American New Wave Movement with *Dangerous Visions*, his avowed aim was to smash the taboos of content. But a quick perusal of Berkley's current reissue reveals that even the "*Dangerous Visions* New Wave," whose screed was subject matter, had, in the actual fiction, more to do with what Moorcock was overtly interested in evolving: namely, the subject of this essay, *style*.

There are, I would contend, only five major angles of stylistic attack in the writing of fiction. One can write what Algis Budrys calls "transparent prose," in which the object is to write in a style so lucidly neutral that the reader forgets that he is reading it and is focused entirely on the events of the story. One can go to the other extreme and develop an auctorial style that is entirely one's own and filter all your stories through its sensibility like Jack Vance or J.G. Ballard or Philip K. Dick or William Burroughs. Or one can opt for the first-person technique where one or more of the characters tells the story in his own style of prose and consciousness, like *Riddley Walker* or *The Void Captain's Tale*. Or one can adopt a third-person narrative voice for each story in which the author himself speaks in the language of his world, like *The Stars My Destination* or *Barefoot in the Head*. Finally, and most rarely, you occasionally run into a book like William Burroughs' *Cities of the Red Night* or Benford's *Across the Sea of Suns* in which the author creates a montage of two or more of the above stylistic modes.

Notice that the above applies to all fiction, though not with equal centrality. Choosing the stylistic angle of attack is of course absolutely critical when it comes to creating historical fiction designed to recreate the ambiance of the past, but it is not quite such an influence on contemporary fiction, since there the languages of characters, authors, and reader have no sharp distinctions.

In this respect, of course, science fiction is like historical fiction, only more so. If SF is not dealing with the future, which it is more often than not, it is dealing with an altered present. The fact of the matter is that people twenty years from now will not be speaking anything we would recognize as "transparent prose" and by the time our descendants get to Betelgeuse their "English" will be entirely incomprehensible to the 20th century. So the science fiction writer must choose an angle of stylistic attack that will on the one hand convey the ambiance of his imaginary universe and on the other be comprehensible to his readers.

Of course one school of stylistic thought copes with this esthetic problem by ignoring it. Which is to say there is nothing stopping a science fiction writer from describing 35th century consciousness in the neutral transparent prose of his own immediate present. Indeed, many have promoted the notion that since the subject matter of SF is bizarre and surreal, it is best

RETRIEVED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

portrayed for the sake of clarity in a prose style which disappears into the woodwork.

For most of the history of SF, most of the editors were of this opinion, and we find most science fiction written in precisely this neutral transparent prose. (This is not to say that this stylistic mode is incapable of achieving high art, see Hemingway, Sturgeon, Dickson, or Vonnegut, for example.)

But before the British New Wave started shaking things up stylistically, almost all science fiction writers confined themselves to perfecting transparent prose, and indeed hardly perceived that other and more powerful stylistic modes for creating SF even existed.

What Moorcock did with entirely conscious intent was to point beneath the events and settings of SF to the texture of the reality as conveyed in the prose. Consciousnesses inhabiting an extrapolated reality would be different from our own in *style* as well as content, and the only medium whereby the writer can at least attempt to convey the illusion of this textural difference is the style of the prose.

Perusing what is being written now in the 1980s, long after the lesson of the New Wave has been absorbed into the mainstream of SF even by writers who would be apalled to admit it, this seems quite obvious.

A relatively thin slice of recent history shows almost all of the stylistic modes consciously applied to the material of science fiction in decidedly untransparent prose. Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* applies the stylistic mode of having his main character narrate his post-collapse story in the least transparent prose in recent memory, for not only is the whole novel told in thick dialect of the future, the very spelling has been recombinantly mutated to the point of Babel. In *Dramocles*, Robert Sheckley, with quite deliberate surreal comic intent, narrates the tale of what he calls an Intergalactic Soap Opera with the delivery of his own contemporary rap. A.A. Attansio's *Radix* was narrated by the author in prose that at least suggested the language of his imaginary world.

And in *Across the Sea of Suns*, Gregory Benford has produced one of those rare novels which shift back and forth between several stylistic modes, from transparent auctorial exposition, to third-person viewpoint, to stream of the characters' extrapolated consciousness. All this in a work of science fiction that qualifies with flying colors as "hard SF."

Indeed, to see how far we have come from stylistically transparent science fiction, consider a first novel by a member of the latest generation of science fiction writers, *Neuromancer* by William Gibson, and ponder what chance it would have had of being published or even written before the era of the New Wave.

Neuromancer is also hard SF of the purest sort, at least in terms of its realistically detailed depiction of an Earth and an L-5 "archipelago" of a century or so hence, and in terms of the way its plot and theme are directly derived from the consequences of advances in com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

puter science. Indeed, its protagonist is a kind of outlaw superhacker engaged in a complicated plot revolving about the evolution of hive mind and artificial intelligence.

But *Neuromancer* is also exactly the sort of thing that might have been published in the old *New Worlds*. Whether consciously or not, Gibson has absorbed the lessons of Ballard and Moorcock, of William Burroughs and Philip K. Dick, of Ellison and Bester. For one thing the novel is basically narrated from the third-person viewpoint of the protagonist and in a prose which admirably conveys the texture of his world. For another thing, while hardware and software are the absolute warp and woof of this texture, the ambiance conveyed is entirely novel, a kind of high-tech punk or electronic junkie, more reminiscent of certain strains of contemporary music, of William Burroughs and Dick, rather than vintage Heinlein or Niven.

It is hard to remember that this is a first novel, not only because it is a work of unusual maturity written in an idiosyncratic style well under control, but because not so very long ago, say before 1966, one would have had to have had a preexisting reputation to get something like this pubblished as a science fiction novel. As a result, SF novelists of those days began their careers hardly knowing that the possibility of writing science fiction like this existed. And from their point of view, at least in a commercial sense, it didn't.

A reading of Gibson's short fiction reveals that he was writing like this from the beginning, and while for all I know the man is simply a natural genius, I think it quite likely that what he epitomizes is the way that at least a small segment of the current crop of new science fiction writers have absorbed the lessons of the New Wave as a fairly obvious given. Once science fiction writers started to see that what most of them had been collectively writing was only one possible stylistic mode, and when once even adopting transparency was elevated to the level of a conscious choice, there was no turning back the arrow of evolution.

In this sense, literature, or at least science fiction, *does* evolve progressively, like technology, in that the expanded perspectives gained by one generation of SF writers get passed down to the next via the literature so that the next, if not smarter or even more knowledgeable, at least starts with a greater perception of the possibilities.

Subject matter, taboos, fads, obsessions, these are all timebound to some extent; they come and go, and the content of the science fiction of their eras cannot help but be influenced. So too the specific styles in which science fiction may be written must be, at least to some extent, influenced—or even created—by the styles of perception and consciousness surrounding the writer while he is in the process of writing it. In that sense, the New Wave is now a piece of science fiction's literary history.

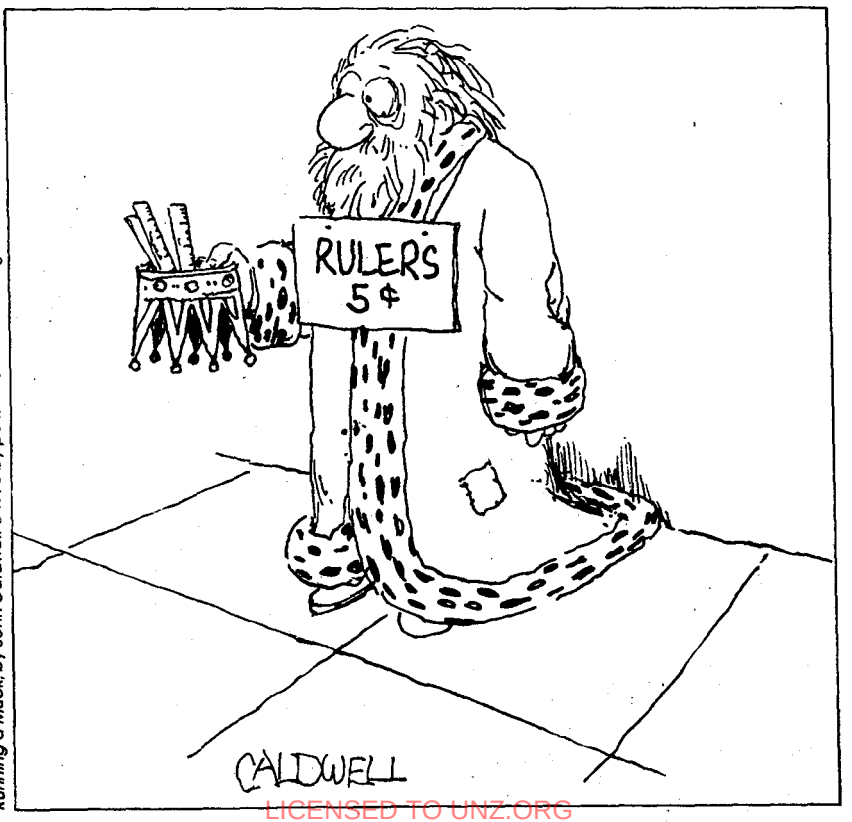
But in another sense the New Wave is still breaking on the shore.

ARCHIVED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For, once science fiction as a whole was liberated from the narrow perspective that the wonders of the future could be described only in the workmanlike prose of the present, once all science fiction writers were at least awakened to the fact that style could be part of the science fictional content, once a literary movement started extrapolating with the prose and form, there came into being a discontinuity of enhanced possibilities that was permanent.

Thus the New Wave was not "content" or "style." It was the realization that the true style of science fiction is multiplexity of style. That is the New Wave's legacy. That is its monument. ●

We're pleased to announce that Norman Spinrad has agreed to write four book-review columns per year for us, thus giving our severely overworked and long-suffering regular reviewer, Baird Searles, some much-needed time off. The preceding column was the first of these, and the next one will appear in our December 1984 issue. We hope you'll enjoy this literary change of pace as much as we do.



Running a Muck, by John Caldwell ©1978 by permission of Writer's Digest Books

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED MARKET PLACE

ISAAC ASIMOV—is published 13 times a year. The rate for CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS is $2.20 per word — payable in advance — minimum ad $44.00. Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. To be included in the next issue, please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

AUTHOR'S SERVICE

SCIENCE Fiction makes for many successful self published books. Get personalized assistance publishing it yourself. Lowell Moss Creative Services, 760 Market #1036A, San Francisco, CA 94102.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

SCIENCE Fiction/Fantasy. Free catalog of pulps, digests, paperbacks, hardcovers. Collections also purchased. Ray Bowman, Box 5845A, Toledo, Ohio 43613.

ALL available paperbacks, hardcovers supplied quickly & efficiently. World-wide service since 1973. Quarterly catalogue, free US/CANADA; $1 elsewhere. THE SCIENCE FICTION SHOP, 56 EIGHTH AVE., N.Y., N.Y. 10014.

MAKE YOUR OWN CLASSIFIED AD PAY. Get "How to Write A Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth $2.00 towards a classified ad. Send $2.25 (includes postage) to I.M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

FREE MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTIONS! Everything Free. Reading Material, Research Guides, Books, etc. Large Variety. Newsletter of free offerings. Details Free. Sampler, Box 263Z, Eastchester, NY 10709.

BUY IT WHOLESALE

FIREWORKS: For catalog send $1.00 to: Fireworks, Box 792, Tiffin, OH 44883 or call in Ohio 1-800-821-7901, outside Ohio 1-800-821-2483.

EDUCATION AND INSTRUCTION

LEARN electronics in 24 weeks. Amazing simple learning system. For free introductory lesson write Insight Resources, 2117 Hollywood Blvd., Suite 30, Hollywood, FL 33020.

MISCELLANEOUS

OLDTIME radio programs. Suspense, drama, science fiction, comedies. Highly enjoyable tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Route One, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

EARN Money at home. You could be financially independent. Miller, Box 306, Ripley, N.Y. 14775.

BECOME A POSSIBLE MILLIONAIRE! Win thousands instantly! Enter the Colorado State Lottery. Anyone can enter. For complete details send $3.00 to: H & S Jones Enterprises, 8944 Quigley, Dept. Q, Westminster, CO 80030.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Hundreds of sincere members! All Ages! Free information! Write: Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

ORIENTAL Ladies. Faithful, traditional, affectionate. Thousands seeking marriage, now! Cherry Blossoms, Box 1021DA, Honokaa, Hawaii 96727.

THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THE ZIP CODE; please be sure to include your zip code when ordering merchandise from classified advertisements. You'll receive faster delivery.

RADIO & TELEVISION

CABLE TV descrambler plans. Complete and easily followed $2.98. Stevens Publishing Co., Dept. ASF, Box 20286, Bowling Green, KY 42102-6286.

START YOUR OWN BUSINESS

PROFITS ARE POSSIBLE in any business. Ten Magic Lists help you decide what is profitable for your enterprise. $4.95: The J-M People, Mentor Series-1, P.O. Box 480992, Los Angeles, CA 90048.

LICENSED TO ...
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

The summer con(vention) season is upon us, leading up to the WorldCon in LA (after the Olympics). Make plans now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 (long) envelope) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. (703) 273-6111 is the hot line. If a machine answers, leave your area code and number. I'll call back on my nickel. Send a #10 SASE when writing. For free listings, tell me about your con 6 months ahead. Look for me behind the Filthy Pierre badge at cons.

JULY, 1984

6-8—**EmpiriCon.** For info, write: **Box 682, New York NY 10008.** Or phone: **(703) 273-6111** (10 am to 10 pm only, not collect). Con will be held in: Queens NY (if city omitted, same as in address) at the Sheraton La Guardia. Guests will include: G. Harry Stine (Lee Correy), the Coulsons. Jim Odbert.

13-15—**MapleCon.** At Carleton University, Ottawa ON. Larry (Ringworld) Niven, R. (Elfquest) Pini.

20-22—**UniCon, Box 263, College Park MD 20740. (301) 747-8215.** Sheraton Silver Spring MD (near Washington DC). Gene (Book of the New Sun) Wolfe. Masquerade (Sat. PM). A traditional DC con.

20-22—**RiverCon, Box 58009, Louisville KY 40258.** A. J. Offutt (John Cleve), M. Resnick, S. Webb, C. L. Grant, F. Robinson, L. Watt-Evans, B. Breuer, the Eastlakes. Masquerade, Sun. riverboat ride.

20-22—**OKon, Box 4229, Tulsa OK 74159.** Stephen Donaldson, C. J. Cherryh, James P. Hogan, W. A. (Bob) Tucker, Robert Asprin, Robert (Buck) & Juanita Coulson. Victoria Wheeler, Warren Norwood Jr.

20-23—**AlbaCon, % Nelson, 62 Campsie Rd., Wishaw ML2 9QG, UK.** Glasgow, Scotland. Harlan Ellison. Traditional, print-SF-oriented con, now in its 9th year (vs. more media-oriented FairCon, below).

20-23—**FairCon, % Simpson, 18 Greenwood Rd., Clarkton, Glasgow, UK.** S. Jordan. 2000 AD Team.

27-29—**Archon, Box 50125, Clayton MO 63105. (314) 862-8731.** St. Louis MO. L. Sprague & Catherine Crook deCamp. C. J. ("Downbelow Station") Cherryh, artist Jack Gaughan. A weekend all its own, now.

AUGUST, 1984

3-5—**Atlanta Fantasy Fair, Box 566, Marietta GA 30061.** Atlanta GA. Larry (Ringworld) Niven, Bob ("Psycho") Bloch, F. J. Ackerman, Sharon Webb. Over 3000 expected at this media-oriented event.

3-5—**OmaCon, 2518 S. 167, Omaha NE 68130.** M. S. Murdock, Dell Harris, David Lee Anderson. Gaming.

8-10—**ParaCon, Box 1156, State College PA 16801.** Marvin Kaye, Peggy Rae Pavlat. Very congenial.

8-10—**MythCon, 6017 Avila Ave., El Cerrito CA 94530. Oakland CA.** For fans of Tolkien, etc.

24-27—**OxCon, % Porter, 28 Asquith Rd., Rose Hill, Oxford OX4 4RH, England, UK.** Brian Aldiss.

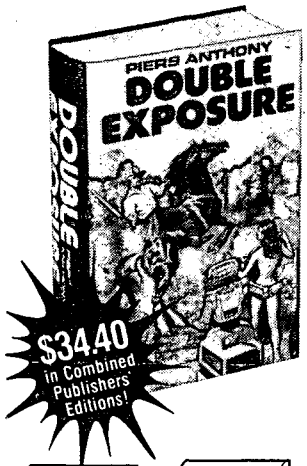
30-Sep. 3—**LACon 2, Box 8442, Van Nuys CA 91409.** Anaheim CA. WorldCon '84. Join there for $75.

AUGUST, 1985

22-26—**AussieCon 2, Box 428, Latham NY 12110 USA.** Melbourne, Australia. The WorldCon for 1985.

30-Sep. 2—**ChiliCon, Box 9612, Austin TX 78766.** The North American SF Interim Con for 1985 (NASFIC's are held only in years when WorldCon is outside North America). 3000 fans expected.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

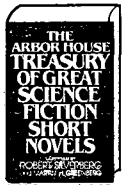


YOURS FREE WITH MEMBERSHIP DOUBLE EXPOSURE

Giant 790-page 3-in-1 volume brings you *Split Infinity*, *Blue Adept*, and *Juxtaposition*.

4721 Pub. ed. $14.95

0018 Pub. ed. $7.95



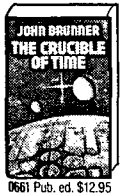
9076 Pub. ed. $19.95

1107 Pub. ed. $14.95

0729 Pub. ed. $13.95

0836 Pub. ed. $11.95

0711 Spec. ed.



0661 Pub. ed. $12.95

0737 Nonfiction. Spec. ed.

0786 The Guardians of Time: Time Patrolman. Spec. ed.

0695 Hiero's Journey: The Unforsaken Hiero. Spec. ed.

0752 Elric of Melnibone: The Sailor on the Seas of Fate; The Weird of the White Wolf. Spec. ed.

And take any 4 for $1 WITH MEMBERSHIP

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR ADDITIONAL SELECTIONS.

How the Club works:

You'll receive your choice of any 4 books for only $1 (plus *shipping and handling*) and a free copy of *Double Exposure* after your application for membership is accepted. We reserve the right to reject any application. However, once accepted as a member, you may examine the books in your home and, if not completely satisfied, return them within 10 days at Club expense. Your membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing. The FREE book will be yours to keep whether or not you remain a member.

About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), we'll send you the Club's bulletin, *Things to Come*, describing the 2 coming Selections and a variety of Alternate choices. In addition, up to 4 times a year you may receive offers of special Selections, always at low Club prices. If you want the 2 Selections, you need do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically.

If you don't want a Selection, prefer an Alternate, or no book at all, just fill out the convenient form always provided and return it to us by the date specified.

We allow you at least 10 days for making your decision. If you do not receive the form in time to respond within 10 days and receive an unwanted Selection, you may return it at our expense.

As a member you need take only 4 Selections or Alternates during the coming year. You may resign any time thereafter or continue to enjoy Club benefits for as long as you wish. One of the 2 Selections each month is only $3.98. Other Selections are higher, but always much less than hardcover publishers' editions—up to 65% off. The Club offers more than 300 books to choose from. A shipping and handling charge is added to all shipments. Send no money now, but do mail the coupon today!

Note: Prices shown are publishers' edition prices.

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB®

Dept. RR-061, Garden City, N.Y. 11530

I want the best SF in or out of this world! Please accept my application for membership in the Science Fiction Book Club. Send me the 4 books whose numbers I have indicated in the *boxes below plus my FREE book and bill me just* $1 (*plus* shipping and handling). I agree to the Club Plan as described in this ad. I will take 4 more books at regular Club prices in the coming year and may resign any time thereafter. The FREE book will be mine to keep whether or not I remain a member. SFBC offers serious works for mature readers.

FREE BOOK #5637	1.	2.	3.	4.

Mr.
Ms. _____
(Please print)

Address _____ Apt. # _____

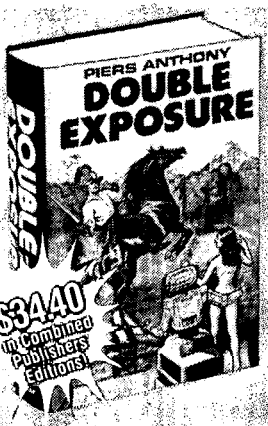
City _____

State _____ Zip _____

If under 18, parent must sign. _____

The Science Fiction Book Club offers its own complete hardbound editions sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save you even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Canada. Offer slightly different in Canada. 50-S265D

LICENSED TO JOHN ...
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



WITH MEMBERSHIP

Giant 790-page 3-in-1 volume brings you *Split Infinity*, *Blue Adept*, and *Juxtaposition*.

0489 Pub. ed. $14.95

0166 Pub. ed. $16.95

7328 Pub. ed. $15.95

0653 Pub. ed. $15.95

1099 Pub. ed. $15.95

0133 Spec. ed.

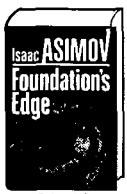
0976 Pub. ed. $13.95

0935 Pub. ed. $14.95

★ 0950 Pub. ed. $15.95

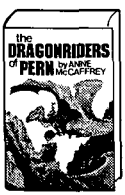
†0984 Spec. ed.

★ 0414 Spec. ed.



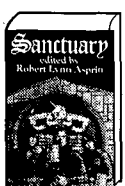
5561 Pub. ed. $14.95

0075 All 5 Amber novels. 2 vols. Comb. pub. ed. $32.30

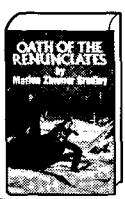


2543 Dragonflight; Dragonquest; The White Dragon. Comb. pub. ed. $26.85

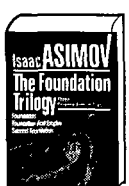
0943 Another Fine Myth; Myth Conceptions; Myth Directions; Hit or Myth. Spec. ed.



0539 Thieves' World; Tales from the Vulgar Unicorn; Shadows of Sanctuary. Spec. ed.



0554 The Shattered Chain; Thendara House. Spec. ed.



6221 Foundation; Foundation and Empire; Second Foundation. Pub. ed. $17.95

AND TAKE ANY 4 FOR $1
WITH MEMBERSHIP

See other side for coupon and additional Selections.

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB®

*Explicit scenes and/or language may be offensive to some.
Note: Prices shown are publishers' edition prices.

†©1983 by Paramount Pictures Corporation. All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

50-S265D